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## Get Conscious

With competition within the seed industry at an all time high, your grower customers are paying more attention than ever on how you operate. Corporate social responsibility can be an essential part of building trust, improving communication and fostering success with customers and employees alike, which at the end of the day will increase seed sales and your customer base. However, you must go beyond giant charitable check presentations and brand-building sponsorship opportunities, and ensure your efforts are built on a solid foundation of sincerity and mutual respect.

### csr

Corporate social responsibility can be an essential part of regenerating trust, building communication and fostering success with customers and employees alike.

#### PERCEPTION MATTERS

It turns out, in the minds of today's consumers, that CSR isn't just about environmental stewardship and charitable donations. Those are crucial, of course, to being a responsible player in today's world; however, it's the "social" in CSR that most concerns consumers—and getting that part right is what will win them over and keep them coming back to your company.

In 2006 and again in 2007, the National Consumers League, the oldest consumer advocacy group in the United States, commissioned public relations firm Fleishman-Hillard to study the meaning of corporate social responsibility

among the public. When they asked interviewees to answer, unprompted, what the phrase "corporate social responsibility" meant to them, participants volunteered "commitment to employees" more than any other definition in 2006. In 2007, focus on employees stayed strong, dropping just below "commitment to communities," but remaining far ahead of environmental protection and charitable giving. Moreover, when they asked what was most important to consumers, the answer "treats/pays employees well" far outstripped any other response, and was cited by twice as many of survey participants as "responsive to customer needs."

According to the second annual Corporate Social Responsibility Perceptions Survey:

**70%** OF AMERICAN CONSUMERS ARE WILLING TO PAY A PREMIUM ON \$100-PRODUCTS FROM A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE COMPANY.

**59%** OF THOSE RESPONDING SAID THEY PLAN TO SPEND THE SAME OR MORE ON PRODUCTS FROM SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE COMPANIES.

#### BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Redefine the way your company approaches corporate social responsibility by building good relationships.

- Put policies in place based on a philosophy of caring and your company's priorities, and let your CSR efforts naturally flow from these. This will ensure your CSR efforts look, feel and smell genuine. Consumers are repelled by programs that aim to build the company's brand instead of building better communities.
- Give front-line staff the power to make customers happy. It can be frustrating for an already aggrieved consumer to wait while the employee who said "no" has to check through channels to turn that answer to "yes." If you can't trust your employees to make sound decisions, maybe you're hiring the wrong people.
- Ensure all your company communications can be associated with a real, live human. People your web site and other corporate materials with engaging, friendly images of those who work for you—from the CEO right down the line—and let their real voices ring through.

- Use social marketing widely, but use it correctly—as a way to connect to your customers, not as another way to market to them. It's all about two-way communication (that's what makes it social). Send out something interesting, and always listen and respond to what they're telling you.
- Remember the benefits of being human. For real relationships to bloom, face-to-face beats Facebook every time.

#### WHAT IS CSR?

- Corporate social responsibility is a crucial factor in rebuilding relationships with wary customers.
- When defining CSR, customers consider the commitment to and well-being of employees far ahead of their own needs, environmental protection and charitable giving.
- Considering employees first is the best way to take care of customers.
- To win goodwill—foster success, provide community and focus on the social and esteem needs of your employees. Make a human connection via two-way communication with customers and employees alike.

IT'S THE "SOCIAL" IN CSR THAT MOST CONCERNS CONSUMERS.

#### ETHICAL ADVOCATES

In an Ipsos study exploring the corporate reputation of 30 major U.S. businesses, 26 percent of Americans fall into a group dubbed "Ethical Advocates." These consumers regularly advise friends, family and colleagues to patronize—or more often, not to patronize—a particular company. Ethical Advocates know more about major corporate brands than the general population. Moreover, Ethical Advocates are critical. They are 63 percent more likely to be unfavorable toward companies. Keep these opinionated consumers on your side. Ensure your CSR and employee treatment policies are readily available.

