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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Growers, Industry and NGOs Join to Create Agriculture Sustainability Initiative**

*Index will give growers tool to evaluate their operation*

**NASHVILLE, TENN.** (Feb. 29, 2008) – Growers, conservation organizations and companies throughout the ag supply chain have teamed up to launch a first-of-its-kind working group focused on creating sustainable outcomes for agriculture, the group reported in a press conference during Commodity Classic.

“Sustainability is becoming increasingly important to consumers as they make their food choices,” said Sarah Stokes Alexander, director of sustainability and leadership programs for The Keystone Center, the non-profit group facilitating the initiative. “By creating this coalition, participants throughout the food supply chain are demonstrating their ongoing commitment to increasing productivity to meet future food and fiber needs while decreasing impacts on the environment.”

The group’s initial focus will be creating a sustainability index to measure and track the impact of agriculture in terms of environment and natural resource sustainability. This prototype index will analyze and report use of land, water, energy, greenhouse gas emissions and crop production inputs in four key commodity crops – corn, cotton, soybeans and wheat.

“Continued improvements in efficient land use will be critical if we’re going to meet the ever growing demand for food and fiber without putting more pressure on our environmental resources,” said Jason Clay for World Wildlife Fund.

Nearly all crops have experienced gains in terms of energy use and efficiency. According to John Hoffman, president of the American Soybean Association and farmer from Waterloo, Iowa, “Soybeans have witnessed long-term, sustained growth, while corn and cotton have also seen gains over the past 10 years. New technologies and better plant genetics have helped us increase yields and reduce trips over the field for tillage, weed and insect control.”

Agriculture has a good sustainability story to tell, but also must continue to improve. The group is piloting a grower sustainability tool this spring that can help growers evaluate their

individual operation against the industry-wide index. The tool will also provide a library of information to assist growers in further improving their sustainability practices.

“Farmers have always considered themselves environmental stewards and have substantially improved production practices and efficiencies over the years,” said Ron Litterer, president of the National Corn Growers Association. “Moving forward, growers must do even more to lead sustainable change in our food production for the benefit of future generations.”

This new index will help growers quantify and demonstrate their care for the environment, as well as share best practices. The grower sustainability tool will also be constructed to maintain individual confidentiality. These efforts are designed to document accelerated improvements throughout the food and fiber production system.

“This initiative is also important to food companies and retailers who are beginning to document the footprint of their production and operations,” said Jeffrey Barach, vice president and director of the Center for Technical & Laboratory Services for the Grocery Manufacturers Association. “Together we can deliver better decision making throughout the supply chain and help meet the goal of a more sustainable food and fiber production system.”

An initial report is expected to be released this summer and will serve as a roadmap for growers to track their own progress. Future reports will expand to look at economic and social measures of agriculture sustainability in the context of meeting global food and fiber demands.

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