



INTERFAITH CENTER ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**AT ANNUAL MEETINGS, SHAREHOLDERS HIGHLIGHT MULTIPLE RISKS FROM POULTRY OPERATIONS**

*Investors say environmental, human rights and health impacts from poultry operations may threaten social license.*

**NEW YORK, NY, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>** – Investors in poultry companies are speaking out at annual meetings this year to raise what they say are serious environmental and social concerns they believe are material to shareholders and may jeopardize companies’ social license to operate.

The investors are all members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility which has led a multi-year campaign calling for greater accountability in the poultry sector. In shareholder-sponsored resolutions on the 2018 proxies at Tyson Foods (TSN), Pilgrim’s Pride (PPC) and Sanderson Farms (SAFM), investors are citing three main areas they believe expose poultry companies to excessive legal, regulatory and reputational risks with serious financial consequences: worker health and safety issues; water contamination violations, and; antibiotics misuse. Combined, the investors say these issues highlight the need for policies that will advance worker justice and sustainability.

**Tyson and Water Pollution:** Fines for water violations and permit exceedances continue to plague Tyson - demonstrated by a \$2 million fine this year - as it lacks a comprehensive and effective approach to water management. In the communities where it operates, Tyson is a primary source of water pollution due to chemicals, especially nitrates and fertilizer inputs that wash off fields into local waterways. In addition, the wastewater from Tyson’s 11,000 independent or contract farmers may contain nutrients, antibiotic-resistant bacteria and pathogens. Investors argue that these contaminants and poor manure disposal practices pollute local waterways, endangering public health, workers, and the environment.

Said Mary Beth Gallagher of the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, *“Whether they result from direct operations or via downstream supply chains, community water impacts are the responsibility of all poultry companies, given the sector’s extraordinary risk. Our resolution at Tyson calls for a comprehensive water stewardship policy that will mitigate these risks, safeguarding the company’s license to operate as well as the human right to water for communities near poultry operations.”*

**Pilgrim's Pride and Worker Justice:** Workers in the poultry sector have experienced a long history of workplace and human rights violations, including unsafe line speeds, exposure to antibiotics, worker harassment and unethical recruitment practices that may lead to debt bondage. Research demonstrates that poultry workers suffer elevated rates of injury and illness and face obstacles in reporting poor working conditions. While Pilgrim's Pride has publicly stated that health and safety is core to the company and that it is committed to providing a safe work environment, news reports and OSHA investigations have identified a substantial gap between its public statements and company policies, and actual conditions inside plants.

Magaly Licolli of the Northwest Arkansas Worker Justice Center observed, ***“Workers in the poultry sector are exposed to terrible working conditions and serious health and safety risks. Most of our workers are injured due to excessive line speeds in poultry processing plants and once injured, many are unable to return to work or find other jobs, perpetuating the cycle of poverty in these communities. Poultry corporations need to do more than adopt policies; they need accountability mechanisms that will ensure that workers voices are included in ways that fully support the health, safety and prosperity of the workforce as well as the long-term sustainability of communities.”***

**Sanderson Farms and Antibiotics Misuse:** The World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have reported that antibiotic resistance is a global public health crisis that threatens to overturn many of the medical advances made over the last century. Antibiotics are losing their effectiveness in significant part to reckless overuse in farm animal production. The more antibiotics are used, the faster antibiotic-resistant bacteria evolve: the human and economic consequences of this cannot be overestimated. Because over 70% of medically important antibiotics in the U.S. are sold for animal agriculture to prevent illness caused by the unhealthy, stressful conditions on factory farms, investors urge meat and poultry companies to adopt policies that will phase out antibiotics use other than for treating illness.

Said Austin Wilson of As You Sow, ***“Sanderson is facing increased competition and scrutiny on the antibiotics issue both from companies like Perdue, that have stronger policies in place, and consumers who are increasingly concerned about reckless antibiotic use. In addition, research has shown that poultry processing workers are 32 times more likely to carry antibiotic-resistant E. coli bacteria likely due to antibiotics exposure in poultry plants. These are all serious business risks that the company needs to urgently address.”***

The investors have published a document, [Best Practice Guidance for Poultry Companies](#), which outlines specific recommendations to strengthen policies and practices around worker justice, water stewardship and antibiotics use which will be used in their ongoing engagements with the sector. The shareholder proposals will go to a vote at the companies' annual meetings beginning with Tyson's meeting in Springdale, Arkansas today.

### **About the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)**

Celebrating its 47th year, ICCR is the pioneer coalition of shareholder advocates who view the management of their investments as a catalyst for social change. Its 300 member organizations comprise faith communities, socially responsible asset managers, unions, pensions, NGOs and other socially responsible investors with combined assets of over \$400 billion. ICCR members engage hundreds of corporations annually in an effort to foster greater corporate accountability. [www.iccr.org](http://www.iccr.org)