



By **Laurie Bedord**, Executive Editor, Ag Technology

BRIAN P. SYLVESTER

Navigating the food production process from farm to table addresses future needs.

Early on in his legal career, Brian P. Sylvester landed at USDA, where he learned firsthand how the U.S. government works to promote innovation in agriculture. Seizing that opportunity paved the way for his current science-based food law practice, where he works with some of the world's leading food and agriculture companies.

"I represent a broad array of start-ups, leading global brands, and trade associations advising them on high-stakes matters related to regulation by the USDA, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC)," says Sylvester, who is the special counsel at Wiley Rein LLP in Washington, D.C.

Sylvester shares his insight on the evolving food industry and how the companies he represents are working to meet consumer demands.

SF: How do you help companies navigate every stage of the food production process?

BS: Five examples of my

day-to-day practice, which focuses on food and agricultural biotechnology law, include the following.

- **Helping companies obtain approvals** for new, genetically engineered plant varieties from USDA and FDA.

- **Advising meat and poultry producers and marketers** on compliance and enforcement issues arising under the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act.

- **Helping growers and food processors** establish compliance with USDA's National Organic Program.

- **Providing strategic legislative and policy advice** to trade associations and corporations concerning FDA- and USDA-regulated products.

- **Counseling food and beverage companies** through recalls and market withdrawals to stem business disruption, cost, and damage to brands.



SF: How have the law, science, and agriculture increasingly intersected over the past five years?

BS: The hottest topic in food law is innovative foods. Agriculture and science have converged to create sustainable and creative solutions to food production. For example, in the area of plant biotechnology, developers are hard at work employing gene-editing techniques like CRISPR.

At start-ups around the world, advances in cellular agriculture are fomenting the scale-up of cell-based meats, poultry, and seafood, which could be coming to a dinner plate near you in the next three to four years. Investments in cell-based meat start-ups by meat industry leaders Tyson Foods and Cargill indicate that this industry is seeking to expand its protein offerings in a way that complements conventional animal agriculture. We also have plant-based meats, with "bloody" plant burgers making headlines.

SF: What is driving this intersection?

BS: Consumer tastes and expectations are driving these groundbreaking innovations. With a global population forecast to hit nearly 10 billion by 2050 and consumers increasingly seeking out ethically raised, clean-label foods, industry is as incentivized as it has ever been to push the boundaries of innovation to produce safe and wholesome foods.

SF: As we look to future food production, what challenges do you see on the horizon at the farm level? At the consumer level? How do we overcome those challenges?

BS: The ballooning human population combined with evolving consumer palates will require agriculture to develop even more efficient, sustainable methods of producing high-quality foods. The challenge will be for farmers to become open to such

change and to develop strategies and partnerships to reap the benefits from continued innovations in agriculture.

At the consumer level, both the U.S. government and industry stakeholders will need to educate Americans on the benefits of new, innovative food offerings ranging from bioengineered foods to plant-based and cell-based meats. **SF**