WASHINGTON, DC--October 1, 2015, for Immediate Release – Process food labeling, the role of social media in communicating about genetic engineering and implications for agricultural producers and consumers will be addressed at National C-FAR's research seminar on Monday, October 5, offered at 10 a.m. in 328A Russell Senate Office Building and again at noon in 1300 Longworth House Office Building. In this two-part seminar, the presenters are Dr. Kent Messer, Director of the Center for Experimental and Applied Economics, University of Delaware, and Dr. Kevin Folta, Chairman, Horticultural Sciences Department, University of Florida.

“Consumers are frequently exposed to labels communicating specific processing aspects of food production,” says Messer, a member of the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) committee which produced an issue paper on this topic. “Our paper examines the implications for agricultural producers and consumers.”

“These presentations provide excellent examples of the value of federally funded food and agricultural research, Extension and education in producing the scientific outcomes and outreach needed to meet 21st century challenges and opportunities,” says Chuck Conner, President of the National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (National C-FAR).

Process Labeling of Food-Highlights: Consumers are frequently exposed to labels communicating specific processing aspects of food production. At the root of this phenomenon are the desires for individual control and a diffuse distrust in the safety and health of the food produced by modern agriculture. These desires are paired with concerns about the ethical, social, and environmental consequences of food production. Under appropriate third-party or governmental oversight, these “process labels” can effectively bridge the informational gap between producers and consumers, satisfy consumer demand for broader and more stringent quality assurance criteria, and ultimately create value for both consumers and producers. Despite these potential benefits, process labeling often has serious unintentional consequences. For instance, labeling the benefits of a process for a new niche product can implicitly cast the conventionally produced product in a negative light. This type of stigmatization of the conventional product can be particularly problematic in situations in which no scientific evidence exists that the food produced with the conventional process causes harm, or even that it is compositionally any different. Potential unintended consequences of process labeling are increasing food prices, inducing unsubstantiated quality expectations for the newly labeled products, and stunting scientific and technological advances in agriculture. This CAST Issue Paper examines what is known regarding consumer reaction to process labels, identifies the legal framework for process labeling, and ultimately provides policy recommendations that highlight when process labeling is beneficial or harmful to the agricultural sector and the people who eat the food it produces.

Biotechnology, Social Media and Food Science-Highlights: While the technologies thought of as “genetic engineering” have been used for the last 30 years in medicine and 20 years in agriculture without incident, these tools are much maligned in the public discussion. These technologies have shown to be helpful to farmers, keep food affordable and even have had environmental benefits that outweigh their limitations. New technologies are poised to expand the utility of these tools to more people, especially in the developing world. While discussion of this science has dominated the public discourse, there is little science being discussed. TV chefs, Oz doctors, and Food Babes profit from propagating misinformation and fear, constructing compelling narratives that are thin on facts and soft on science. Scientists that attempt to correct the record are attacked and harassed with abuse of documents obtained through public records requests. This problem means that scientists are reluctant to participate in the discussion, leaving the conversation to be a contentious sniping between activists and corporations. Future policy decisions must be based on science, and our policymakers must connect better with the scientific community to sort the reality from fiction in discussions around this key topic.

The seminar is open to the public and the media. *****
The National Coalition for Food and Agricultural Research (National C-FAR) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, consensus-based, and customer-led coalition that brings food, agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and natural resource stakeholders together with the food and agriculture research and Extension community, serving as a forum and a unified voice in support of sustaining and increasing public investment at the national level in food and agricultural research, Extension, and education. National C-FAR’s Hill Seminar Series, now in its tenth year, regularly presents leading-edge researchers working to provide answers to pressing issues confronting the public and Congress. The Hill Seminar Series helps demonstrate the value of public investment in food and agricultural research—investment that returns 45 percent per year on average, and $20 in economic benefit from every $1 investment in food and ag research.

Go to [http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp](http://www.ncfar.org/Hill_Seminar_Series.asp) for more information about the seminar series and past topics. Interviews with National C-FAR President Chuck Conner are available by request. For additional information, go to [www.ncfar.org](http://www.ncfar.org); or contact Tom Van Arsdall, Executive Director, at [tom@vanarsdall.com](mailto:tom@vanarsdall.com) or (703) 509-4746.