

**Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standards Development**  
**Fundraising Task Force: Appeal for Funding Support**  
Spring 2009

*"...our wide open spaces are not only a blessing to be enjoyed, they are the foundation of a brighter future. How we harness our natural resources – from the farmlands of Iowa to the springs of Colorado – will speak not only to our quality of life, but to our economic growth and our energy future" President Barack Obama, December 17, 2008*

**SUMMARY**

With more than half of the private land in the United States devoted to agriculture, this industry is the single largest user of land and water resources. U.S. agriculture faces significant challenges entering the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however. Farmers and ranchers will have to adapt to a changing climate, increasingly compete for natural resources (such as water), improve crop productivity to meet the food and fiber demands of a growing population and help mitigate greenhouse gases while contributing to energy security. Furthermore, producers will be expected to meet all of these challenges in an era of global economic uncertainty, within a framework of policies developed for the last century. As such, the need for the agricultural sector to come together and agree on a road map towards long term sustainability has never been greater.

The new Administration has made it clear that energy and environmental issues are a leading priority, indeed, *"a defining test of our time."* As the original green industry, U.S. agriculture could become the backbone of a new "green economy" -- but not without new tools, frameworks and metrics that will help them continually improve their operations to meet the challenges ahead.

Our effort to develop sustainable agriculture standards has the necessary broad support from key stakeholders in the U.S. agricultural sector and the international community. By 2012, we will deliver those practical tools that will help agriculture chart and measure its progress toward environmental, social and economic outcomes. Our committee members have pledged over \$1,131,000 in in-kind support to complete the work involved. We estimate that we will need an additional \$1,171,486.80 to cover travel, meeting costs and administrative costs going forward – a leveraging factor of nearly 1 to 1 to support critical work that will give farmers and ranchers a clear road map for agricultural sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**INTRODUCTION**

For at least two decades, myriad groups have tried to confront issues related to the long term sustainability of U.S. agriculture. They debated about what was sustainable and how farmers could achieve sustainability. What mattered? Production practices? Technologies? Environmental outcomes? Size of farm? Diversity of the cropping system? Worker health and safety? Eco-labeling and marketing opportunities?

These discussions ultimately floundered, bogged down by competing visions of sustainable agricultural systems, one influenced by the organic and sustainable agriculture movements, the

other by large scale production agriculture. Completing a real dialogue among key stakeholders that would lead to shared understanding, mutual trust and action to ensure the sustainability of our agricultural systems and their outputs in society and nature remained unattainable. In the meantime, work has continued in other countries to define the standards and metrics of agricultural sustainability, putting us at a possible competitive disadvantage in world markets in the future. And U.S. producers are beginning to experience pressure from buyers, food processors and consumers to vouch for the sustainability of their production systems as climate change forces all of us to look ahead.

In 2007, Scientific Certification Systems Inc. (SCS) initiated a national dialogue on the future of sustainable agriculture in the U.S. by filing a Draft Standard for Sustainable Agriculture Practices (SCS-001) with the American National Standards Institute. SCS-001 triggered a cascade of interest, concerns, and in some cases, formal appeals and litigation reflective of the prevailing belief – *there is no way these camps will ever agree to even come to the table*. But, on 25-26 September 2008, they did -- in-person and by teleconference, fifty-eight voting members of the Standards Committee for the Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standards convened to invest personal and organizational time and resources to talk with, instead of at, each other. Representing every segment of the agricultural sector, these key stakeholders were leaders in their fields. Perhaps equally important, they were also invested in other on-going efforts to establish standards (including the Keystone Field-to-Market Initiative, the Specialty Crop Stewardship Index, the Biofuels Sustainability Standards process, the IPM Options Evaluation Tool, etc.), providing the Standards Committee with the ability and the goal to provide the underlying framework that ties all of these efforts together so that growers are not faced with a patchwork of diverging standards.

## **OUR PROCESS**

The first meeting opened with a palpable tension. Yet, as the Committee set to work on the first day, dialogue was characterized by thoughtful, respectful discussions that fostered several key decisions, chief of which was to set aside SCS-001 and to table it as a reference document. The Committee then moved beyond polarization, got to work and established six Task Force groups to complete key information-gathering tasks before the Full Committee would commence to developing a standard. Many went into this meeting worried about control of issues and results. However, the balance evident in task force structure at the end of the meeting, coupled with the outcome of leadership elections conducted in October 2008, boded well for cooperative collaboration.

The six Task Force groups (Mission and Principles, Needs Assessment, Reference Documents, Metrics and Methodology, Outreach and Funding) have convened primarily by teleconference since December 2008. The Task Force groups are chartered to complete their work prior to the next meeting of the Standards Committee in late May 2009. The level of cooperation, respect and shared commitment among Task Force members is remarkably high.

As this dialogue continues and a framework emerges, many participants are losing their skepticism about whether or not standards are achievable:

*"When we started this process, I was one of the people who was not sure we needed a standard and I was pretty sure this process would not work out for us. But, now, I feel differently and believe that, if the right things happen, we could actually accomplish this."*

Other participants believe that, regardless of the outcome of this process, the current dialogue on the future of sustainable agriculture in the U.S. is critical:

*"I am not sure that it will be possible to construct US Sustainable Agriculture standards, but I am completely convinced that the dialogue among competing visions of US agriculture is essential and urgent. The ANSI Standards Committee is currently the best forum available for this conversation because it is comprehensively multi-stakeholder and transparent in its operations. Even if we cannot yet achieve consensus on standards, the work of the Task Forces has considerable value: we are compiling resources, comparing the operational meaning of agricultural standards across existing standards systems, working out shared principles, and compiling and comparing metrics for measuring the components of sustainability. These efforts lay the groundwork for a shared understanding of sustainable agriculture, buy-in to that vision, and eventual guidelines for practice---all of which are necessary for the survival of US agriculture."*

The emerging consensus within the Standards Committee for the Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standards is that this process will go forward and will likely require a multi-year cycle that is typical of standards development activities. It is too early to predict the outcomes of this effort, but all indications are that this process has the potential to make significant strides, albeit one step at a time, toward sustainability in many dimensions of U.S. agriculture. We now expect that by 2012 this process will yield tools, frameworks and metrics for fostering continual improvement in agriculture and for measuring progress toward environmental, social and economic outcomes desired by all.

#### **INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND BUDGET NEEDS**

The costs for the initial outreach, first meeting and subsequent task force meetings of the Standards Committee have been underwritten by SCS, Inc. Now that the process is revealing the potential for tangible outcomes from sustained collaboration among members, observers and other stakeholders, it is clear that a broader base of financial support is critical to ensure the process is sustained and inclusive.

Over the next three years, these individuals and their organizations will voluntarily contribute time and resources to create a standard that is equitable and of strategic benefit to the nation. We conservatively estimate that their time investment will exceed \$1,131,000 (58 participants x 1 h/wk x 52 weeks/yr x 3 yrs x \$125/h).

We encourage you to consider how you might participate. Our primary needs are threefold and include general meeting support, participation support for Standards Committee members and administrative support:

- **General meeting support: (\$139,486.80/36 months)**
  - Conference calls for Standards Committee, subcommittees and working groups: **\$37,486.80** (15 participants/call x 60 min/call x \$0.089/min x 3 calls/wk x 52 wks/yr x 3 yrs)
  - Meeting facilities and materials for in-person summits: **\$72,000** (\$12,000/meeting x 2 meetings/yr x 3 yrs)
  - Non-Committee member (i.e. observer) participation at in-person summits: **\$30,000** (50 observers x \$100/meeting x 2 meetings/yr x 3 yrs)
  
- **Travel support: (\$174,000/36 months)**
  - Hotel and transportation costs for Committee members, to ensure attendance at in-person summits and sustained engagement by all stakeholder groups represented on the Committee: **\$174,000** (58 Committee members x 2 in-person summits/yr x 3 yrs x \$500 support stipend)
  
- **Administrative support: (\$858,000/36 months)**
  - Ongoing facilitation activities provided by Leonardo Academy – e.g., maintenance of Wiki and Google Groups sites, meeting planning and preparation, preparation and distribution of meeting minutes, process documentation, announcements, continued outreach, ANSI communications, responses to concerns and appeals, responses to general inquiries, etc.
    - i. Staff Member #1: **\$421,200** (36 hrs/wk x \$75/hr x 52 wks x 3 yrs)
    - ii. Staff Member #2: **\$280,800** (36 hrs/wk x \$75/hr x 52 wks x 2 yrs)
    - iii. Staff Member #3: **\$156,000** (20 hrs/wk x \$75/hr x 52 wks x 2 yrs)

The significant commitment of time and the hard work by all involved so far is a strong indication of just how important this effort is to the future of American agriculture. Paraphrasing our President, this work on behalf of farmers and ranchers is “*a defining test of our time.*” Its importance cannot be understated. Without a clear road map to follow towards long-term sustainability, American agriculture will continue to lurch between shifting priorities and outdated policies.

Thank you for your interest in supporting the advancement of sustainable agriculture in the U.S.,

Members of the Fundraising Task Force, Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standards Committee