

SCOPE OF THE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE STANDARD May 27-28, 2009 Standards Committee Meeting

Standard Should Initially End at the Farm Gate*

After discussing the complexity of the task before us, we agreed that addressing issues post farm gate would be overly cumbersome. Post farm gate issues would necessitate the inclusion of dozens of new members to the full committee in order to accurately address the issues facing these interests. The technical expertise that would be necessary to address issues pertaining to supply-chain management, transportation assets and retail store design would require an almost economy wide analysis to ensure that the mission and principles of the standard are upheld. The Needs Assessment Task Force has recognized that the successful development of the Sustainable Agriculture Standard will serve as a framework for expansion to other sectors of the agricultural supply chain and will further harmonize the multiple efforts currently taking place to address post farm gate entities.

Standard Should Initially Be Limited to Crop Production*

We recommend that the initial standard should not address livestock and that sustainable standards for livestock be a high priority when the standards are expanded. While we acknowledge the importance of integrating crops and livestock in a sustainable production system, we believe that including livestock at the beginning of this process would add a level of complexity that would make the process difficult to manage. We agreed that livestock management, as well as other sector-specific standards, should be included according to a module-based approach, once fundamentals such as soil management and annual cropping systems are addressed. Further discussion is needed about how such an approach should work.

Standard Should be Performance Oriented*

Fostering the adoption of practices that can be shown to measurably increase the sustainability of an operation is where true value in this standard lies. Practice standards alone do not fully address the issue of sustainability as the true effect of a practice is unknown. Performance standards, on the other hand, rely on measurable data to demonstrate the positive and negative effects of specific production practices. Performance standards will also encourage producers to monitor their practices over time, giving them invaluable data with which to make future management decisions.

It should be noted that the Mission & Principles Task Force, in developing its Sustainability Principles Document, called for a hybrid approach between performance-based and practice standards. A fuller discussion about how outcomes to be measured are chosen, how monitoring is done and how metrics that are commonly “externalized” (e.g., water and air pollution, social costs) can be allocated to a site-specific operation is needed. If agroecosystem health is a primary objective of a sustainable system, what indicators are most appropriate to monitor?

* The sublanguage under each heading serves as guidance only and can be revised by the Committee to more accurately state the purpose and objective(s) of each heading.