

Environmental Leader



The [Leonardo Academy](#) is working on an American National Standard for Sustainable Agriculture (SCS-001) [now LEO-4000], under the rules of the American National Standards Institute ([ANSI](#)) to define what is sustainable agriculture.

A big area of debate among all players in the agricultural industry is the definition of sustainable agriculture. “What constitutes sustainability in agriculture is a debate that has been going on for decades,” said committee member Ann Sorensen, representing American Farmland Trust, in statement.

One outcome of this effort could be a new “sustainable agriculture” label stamped on food or it could create a system that rewards farmers for doing things like reducing the amount of nitrogen fertilizer they use, reports the [New York Times’ Green Inc. blog](#) .

Forty-eight standards committee members, along with fifteen observers, met in recent months for a two-day summit in St. Charles, Illinois to review Task Force recommendations, laying the groundwork for resolution of key issues in the voluntary standard.

The committee includes a variety of stakeholders like the National Corn Growers Association, General Mills, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and American Farmland Trust, reports the Green Blog.

Key agreements included a series of guidance recommendations:

- The standard development should initially focus on activities up to the farm gate, with a clear intention of expanding the focus to ultimately incorporate post-farm gate considerations.
- The standard should initially be limited to crop production but eventually include other agricultural production.
- The standard should be performance-oriented, which would allow the committee to consider off-farm influences on agricultural production and the supply chain in the future.

One of the more difficult issues facing the committee is how to address the variety of

technologies used by farmers including agrochemicals, integrated pest management, crop rotation, biotechnology and nanotechnology.

A preliminary “draft standard” from 2007 used organic agriculture as a starting point for sustainability, and it prohibited crops that had been genetically modified, according to the Green Inc. blog.

But groups like the American Farm Bureau Federation and the United States Department of Agriculture disagreed, which ultimately scrapped the draft, reports the Green Inc. blog. The new goal is “to develop a standard that is based on verifiable metrics and will allow for any technology that increases agricultural sustainability.”

Russell Williams, director of regulatory relations for the American Farm Bureau, told the Green Inc. Blog, that the organic farming is about four percent of the domestic market. He added: “So if you’re going to talk about ‘sustainable organic agriculture,’ that’s fine. But if you’re going for ‘sustainable agriculture,’ then the standard needs to be much more broad.”

Many organic advocates don’t agree, although they believe developing sustainability standards for use by all farmers could be good for their cause, according to the Green Inc. blog.

A final standard is expected to be completed by 2012.

A recent study, released by DB Climate Change Advisors, [focuses](#) on the steps needed to boost agricultural productivity as the world’s population grows, and indicates that the agriculture sector can participate in the mitigation of climate change due to its ability to store and cycle CO2 and to provide potential offset markets for the trading/management of carbon.

The Leonardo Academy has been involved in drafting sustainability standards for other industries, including [casinos and gaming](#) , for instance.

<http://www.environmentalleader.com/2009/07/08/agribusiness-works-to-define-sustainable-agriculture/>