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Progress Reported as Sustainable Agriculture Standards Committee Takes Next Steps Toward Development of American National Standard

Madison, Wisconsin - June 5, 2009 - Significant progress was made during the second face-to-face meeting of the multi-stakeholder Standards Committee working to develop an American National Standard for Sustainable Agriculture (SCS-001).

Forty-eight Committee members, along with fifteen observers, convened for the two-day summit last week in St. Charles, Illinois to review Task Force recommendations, lay the groundwork for resolution of key issues - including issues never before discussed and debated in an open national forum - and establish the initial subcommittees to carry the Task Force work forward.

Standards Committee Chairman, Dr. Marty Matlock, said, "The process of conceptualizing and developing metrics for sustainable agriculture is moving forward. Particularly impressive was the degree to which all sides in this multi-faceted discussion demonstrated their commitment to the ANSI process and their willingness to work with each other toward consensus." Matlock explained that the stakeholder participants, both Standards Committee members and observers, worked over the past six months through several Task Forces to examine the need for a standard; define the scope, mission and principles of the process; create a first-of-its-kind library of relevant standards, metrics, reports and related materials; and identify various stakeholder needs. "The deliberations in this meeting provided clear direction, based on the Task Force work, for subcommittee structure for the next phase of the ANSI process," he added.

Key agreements made by the Committee included approval of a series of guidance recommendations posed by the Task Force Leadership regarding how the standards development process should proceed: 1) 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; 2) the standard should initially be limited to crop production but eventually include other agricultural production; and 3) the standard should be performance-oriented.

"These basic guiding tenets, and the discussions leading up to the Standards Committee approval, set the stage for a modular approach to building a performance-oriented sustainability standard," said Committee member Hank Giclas, representing Western Growers. "This approach will allow us to develop a template that considers off-farm influences on agricultural production and provides guidance to extend the standard to other agricultural sectors and along the supply chain when the time is ripe."

In terms of mission, the Committee agreed that the standard should "encourage the widespread adoption of agricultural production and handling practices that are ecologically responsible, equitable, economically viable, science-based, meet global demand for a full range of agricultural products and ensure that future generations are able to meet their own needs."

"What constitutes sustainability in agriculture is a debate that has been going on for decades," stated Committee member Ann Sorensen, representing American Farmland Trust. "Obviously, how each person defines sustainability is strongly colored by his or her personal experiences inside an

incredibly diverse industry. But agricultural practices that many thought would be sustainable and adequate to feed our growing population may no longer be desirable in a warming climate with water shortages, increasingly severe weather events, disease and pest outbreaks and the pressing need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture can no longer be business as usual. By identifying some of the most challenging issues and beginning to address them, we laid a tentative framework for the dialogue going forward."

One of the more difficult issues facing the Committee is how to address the myriad technologies utilized by farmers - such as agrochemicals, integrated pest management, crop rotation, biotechnology and nanotechnology - within a sustainability framework. In order to give all constituents the footing they needed to move forward in the standards-setting process, the Committee agreed on the following statement: "Our goal is to develop a standard that is based on verifiable metrics and will allow for any technology that increases agricultural sustainability."

Committee member Jim Barrett, Environmental Horticulture Department at the University of Florida, stressed, "This statement adopted by the Standards Committee is important because it sends a message to all segments of the agricultural community that we are not excluding any appropriate technologies from our considerations as we develop the standards that will help all of agriculture to become more sustainable. The appropriate technologies will vary considerably among the many different segments of agriculture, and we will be addressing all of those as we move forward."

Key issues will continue to be explored in the subcommittees agreed upon by the Committee for the next phase of the process: 1) Criteria Development - Economic Sustainability, 2) Criteria Development - Social Sustainability, 3) Criteria Development - Environmental Sustainability, 4) Reference Library and Information, 5) Structure and Process of Standard Development, 6) Fundraising and Communications and 7) Executive Committee, to be comprised of the Committee Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Vice Secretary, plus the Chair and Co-Chair of each of the other six subcommittees. The subcommittee work is scheduled to begin by the end of June, starting with a transition of the Task Force work into the appropriate subcommittees and the development of work plans for moving forward. Subcommittees will be open for participation by all interested parties.

With two successful meetings under its belt, Standards Committee members recognize that they have crossed an important threshold in the process and that there is room for all of the various perspectives to be vetted in the deliberations. Committee member Grace Gershuny said, "These meetings are bringing together a wide range of interests and viewpoints on some highly controversial issues. The opportunity to have such stimulating conversations is proving extremely valuable. The organic community has a big stake in how sustainable agriculture is defined, and I am pleased to engage with some extraordinary leaders and thinkers in the field, many of whom are participating as volunteers. This process will take time, and I hope that support can be found for this crucial work to continue."

Committee member Bama Athreya, representing the International Labor Rights Forum, added, "ILRF believes the process convened by Leonardo Academy is an important one as it has the potential to raise the bar for US and global agriculture, benefiting farmers and workers everywhere. We are pleased that workers' rights, and more broadly social and human rights, have been acknowledged as an important third pillar to the economic and environmental issues in this Committee's definition of sustainability."

The outcomes of last week's meeting demonstrate the Committee's commitment to addressing all components of sustainability in this standard, as well as its ability to create positive momentum for the work ahead. Committee Vice Chair, Ronald Moore, American Soybean Association, stated, "It is encouraging to work with a diverse group of individuals that represent many sectors of agriculture to create a standard that will have a positive affect on how we produce food, feed and fiber. This group has taken a huge step forward to achieve that goal. We must continue to work together to build a standard that includes performance-oriented metrics, use of technology and a modular process that will take into account the ever changing landscape that is U.S. agriculture."

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