In April 2007, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) proposed a draft Sustainable Agriculture Practice Standard for Food, Fiber and Biofuel Crop Producers and Agricultural Product Handlers and Processors (commonly referred to as SCS-001). SCS’s goal is to formalize this standard as an American National Standard under the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and eventually an International Standard under the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in Geneva, Switzerland.

Largely based on the existing VeriFlora® certification standard for flower production, the initial draft of SCS-001 engendered significant opposition from commodity agriculture. Opposition centered on the draft standards promotion of a non-GMO, organic and fair trade (i.e., fair labor) standards. Several organic/sustainable agriculture organizations also announced their objections to the draft standard, citing dilution of the existing USDA National Organic Program and other eco/sustainable agriculture-related standards.

In the fall of 2007, SCS selected the Leonardo Academy to administer the process of developing SCS-001 into an ANSI standard. SCS selected Leonardo, in part, for its lack of existing contacts in the agricultural community. This inexperience eliminated many potential conflicts of interest, but also resulted in the failure to directly notify many of the larger agricultural organizations such as the American Farm Bureau and various producer or input-specific groups. This led to several commodity groups filing a formal appeal seeking withdrawal of SCS-001. The USDA also sent Leonardo a letter objecting to the exclusion of commodity agriculture and requested action to bring SCS-001 in line with the 1990 Farm Bill’s definition of sustainability.

Pending resolution of the appeal, Leonardo moved forward with selecting a 58 member Standards Committee, comprised of 12 agricultural producers and their trade associations, including American Farm Bureau, American Soybean Association, Corn Refiners Association and National Corn Growers Association; 12 consumers, including food processing/handling companies; 12 environmentalists and 22 general interest representatives. Commodity and input groups not selected filed appeals challenging the committee’s composition. USDA subsequently filed a formal appeal suggesting that Leonardo improperly excluded some major commodity/input groups. A hearing was set for December 17, 2008.

The Standards Committee (and observers including USDA) met for their first meeting in September. In a near consensus vote, the Standards Committee set aside the draft SCS-001, agreeing to use it as a “reference” document along with other relevant standards and initiatives for developing a national sustainable agriculture standard. The committee also formed six Task Forces to gather additional information (e.g., market
demand, methodologies, and comparable standards) and review the vision and principles of sustainable agriculture.

In October, the Standards Committee selected officers including Chair Marty Matlock, University of Arkansas and Vice-Chair Ron Moore, Moore Farms, IL, and American Soybean Association Board. To follow the Standards Committee work on this national sustainable agriculture standard, see the Leonardo Academy website. http://www.leonardoacademy.org/Projects/SustainAgStdDevelopment.htm.

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A. Bryan Endres is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Law at the University of Illinois and a member of the Standards Committee. Thomas P. Redick practices law with Global Environmental Ethics Counsel, St. Louis. Shawna Bligh practices law with The Session Law Firm, Kansas City. Both are SCS-001 “Observers.” This article is adapted from Redick & Bligh, A Twisting Path Toward a National Standard for Sustainable Agriculture, in the November 2008 edition of the Agricultural Law Update.