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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What's the difference between a "metric" and "standard"?

In the context of this project, a "standard" is a required practice or performance score (e.g., a specific irrigation method, a pesticide residue level, etc.). A "metric" defines how to measure performance without imposing a required score or practice (e.g., acre-feet of water applied, energy use per yield, etc.). Standards are valuable for identifying business partners that can achieve a specified level of performance, but they may provide little incentive to improve above the standard and may leave out firms below the standard. This project will develop metrics, not standards.

What's the difference between "performance-based" and "practice-based" metrics?

The Stewardship Index intends to focus on developing measurable, verifiable performance-based metrics. Performance-based metrics will, to the extent feasible, measure actual desired outcomes (e.g., gallons of water conserved, units of energy conserved, etc). These outcomes will occur only if best practices are adopted (e.g., drip irrigation, conservation tillage, etc). By focusing on outcomes, instead of practices, individual firms are freed to innovate and find the practices that work best for them while providing the public with actual data to demonstrate benefits.

Why is this project needed? Aren't there already many sustainability initiatives?

We are sympathetic to the concern that the specialty crop industry is facing proliferating requests to demonstrate "sustainability." However, most existing certification and education programs focus on a niche market, a limited number of crops, and/or a particular link in the supply chain, and are not designed to provide an industry-wide, supply-chain wide system for measuring sustainable performance. Many of these programs are not intended to be inclusive of all producers and may focus on the best performers while leaving little incentive for others to participate. The Stewardship Index, in contrast, aims to develop metrics that address a range of impacts across all specialty crops and can be used by all who wish to participate.

Is this project duplicating work being done by the Field to Market Project (formerly called the Keystone Initiative)?

No. The Field to Market project focuses on performance-based metrics, but it is analyzing existing datasets to estimate sustainable performance of specific agricultural sectors and regions. Also, the Field to Market project is currently focused on "commodity crops" (corn, soy, alfalfa, wheat, etc.) whereas our project will focus on specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, nuts, horticulture, etc). Several Stewardship Index participants are also participating in the Field to Market project and we look forward to sharing knowledge and resources going forward.

How does this fit with Leonardo Academy's ANSI-driven effort, and other new efforts to develop sustainability standards?

Like many other existing sustainable certification programs, the Leonardo Academy's effort initially proposed establishing a pass-fail, practice-based standard. We believe our project can help the ANSI participants recognize the value of adopting performance-based metrics. A focus on metrics may be more feasible than negotiating specific required practices for many diverse commodities. Similarly, we hope that our work can inform other important efforts, like the Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels, Wal-Mart's initiative to develop a sustainable index, and others.

Why is the project using "stewardship" instead of "sustainable" to describe the proposed tool?

We recognize that many stakeholders are sensitive about how the term "sustainable" is used in commerce. Use of the term "stewardship" is compatible with our decision not to try to identify a "sustainable" level of performance.

Recent Questions from Web Site Visitors

Can you provide clarification about what you intend to measure for the issues listed under People, Planet and Profit?

The critical elements of each issue, and how best to measure them, will be determined through the metrics development process. Workgroups for each metric will evaluate these issues. Interested experts and stakeholders can [join the Metrics Review Committee](#) to participate in this process.

Will your system include any measurements for food processing and shelf stable food, or is it mostly concerned with the fresh produce market?

Yes, we are committed to developing metrics for food processors as well as growers, distributors, food service providers and retailers. To participate in this effort, [join the Metrics Review Committee](#).

Who is paying for this project?

The Stewardship Index is made possible by the time and expertise of its many volunteer partners, and by in-kind services provided by members of the Coordinating Council. Significant financial support has been provided by The David and Lucille Packard Foundation (www.packard.org). In addition, the USDA-NRCS awarded a \$630,000 Conservation Innovation Grant to fund the pilot testing of the Stewardship Index metrics. The grant is administered by SureHarvest, with subcontracts to the Western Growers Association and the Natural Resources Defense Council for staff support.

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