(Madison, WI, April 19, 2012) – An initial draft comprised of working documents and reference guide material of the Sustainable Agriculture Standard (ANSI/LEO-4000) has been released for review by the Sustainable Agriculture Standard Committee. The review and revision process will begin at the committee’s annual meeting that is being held in Washington, DC April 24-25, 2012. This marks a milestone achievement in the committee’s aggressive timeline to complete the standard. The committee will now begin the process of review and refinement to prepare the draft standard for release for public comment later this year.

When completed, this standard will create a national framework for driving and evaluating sustainability in agricultural production. For producers, it will provide confirmation of sustainability practices already in place, guidance on how to further advance the sustainability of their operations, and metrics for communicating sustainability achievements to customers. For manufacturers and retailers, it will provide a common tool to guide sustainability specifications for the agricultural products they purchase. For consumers, it will help to clarify the meaning of the term “sustainability” applied to agricultural products, and enable them to make informed choices about the products they purchase. By engaging producers, manufacturers, retailers and consumers, the standard will support a lively marketplace that drives success and economic, social and environmental sustainability in agriculture.

Brian McElroy, Vice President of Supply at Driscoll’s Strawberry Associates and Chair of the Sustainable Agriculture Standard Committee, said, “I believe the release of this working document of the National Sustainable Agriculture Standard (ANSI/LEO-4000) is important for three reasons:

First, it is a major milestone in the development of this standard. The committee set the aggressive goal of completing a working draft standard for review in April 2012 and we have met that goal.

Second, this is the starting gun for the review and refinement of the working draft. The Standard Committee meets next week in Washington, DC. Our next goal is to complete the committee review and revision process over the next few months so that the Standard Committee can approve the release of the draft standard for public comment.

And third, writing a standard for sustainable agriculture is a huge project. We have made
significant progress and acknowledge that there is a lot more work to do. I want to recognize and thank all the dedicated people who are participating in this process and driving the development of this standard. “

While this working draft has been prepared for review and revision internally by the Standard Committee, the opportunity to review the document is open to the public. It is available on the website at www.sustainableagstandard.org. After the Standard Committee review period and revision of this draft standard has been completed, it will be officially released for public comment.

April Standard Committee Meeting in Washington, DC
The annual Sustainable Agriculture Standard Committee meeting will be held April 24-25, 2012 in Washington DC. The national committee will convene to begin the process of reviewing and revising the draft standard work. All stakeholders, process participants and newly interested persons are encouraged to attend all or part of this pivotal Standard Committee meeting as official Observers. Those who are not yet participants or registered observers of the LEO-4000 process and would like to attend the April meeting are encouraged to apply now by contacting jennifer@leonardoacademy.org.

Public Comment Process
When the Standard Committee completes its review and revision process and approves the release of the draft standard for public comment, the public comment period will be announced in the American National Standards Institute publication, Standards Action. After the public comment period is completed, the Standard Committee will review all comments and decide how to address each of the comments received. Once the Standard Committee has addressed all of the public comments, the draft standard will be submitted to ANSI for promulgation as an American National Standard.
http://www.sustainableagstandard.org/

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Opportunities to Participate in Developing the Sustainable Agriculture Standard
There are currently openings for the subcommittees and the voting Standard Committee. Those who are interested can participate at the subcommittee and standard committee levels. Leonardo Academy is seeking producers, manufacturers, retailers, consumers and end-user representatives to participate in writing and reviewing the draft standard. To receive an
application for membership on the Standard Committee, a subcommittee, or for observer status, contact Jennifer Trucks at Leonardo Academy: jennifer@leonardoacademy.org (608) 280-0255, or visit http://www.sustainableagstandard.org/

The Standard Committee
The Standard Committee accommodates a broad range of perspectives. The Standard Committee is working to develop a national standard for sustainable agriculture under the rules of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The Standard Committee consists of a skilled, diverse membership representing a broad range of perspectives from across all areas of agriculture, including commodity and specialty crop producers; agricultural product processors and distributors; food retailers; environmental, labor, and development organizations; NGOs; trade associations; government representatives; academics; regulators and certifiers.

Donations
The development of the Sustainable Agriculture Standard is funded through donations and grants. Please consider making a donation to support Leonardo Academy’s work on developing this standard. Your support will help advance the sustainability through the development of this standard which will provide a framework for improving the social, economic and environmental sustainability in U.S. agriculture.

To make a tax deductible donation to support the development process, go to http://www.leonardoacademy.org/programs/standards/agstandard/donate.html.