

THE NETWORK'S DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Network has had many discussions about how to define 'sustainable' agriculture. To us, sustainable agriculture represents a long-term goal and movement in a direction rather than a specific set of practices, therefore making it difficult to define for a specific situation or moment. However, we believe that there are critical components to sustainable agriculture, and these are embedded in the Network Principles.

The Network defines a sustainable agricultural system as one that is *economically viable, environmentally sound, and socially just over the long term*. Sustainable agriculture also implies that *all* costs associated with our food and fiber system must be accounted taken into account – for example, soil erosion, loss of family farms, impacts of pesticides on human health, and many other “costs” that are not currently quantified in our agriculture and social systems.

Other Definitions of Sustainable Agriculture

“An integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs;
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends;
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations;
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

1990 Farm bill

“Farming systems capable of maintaining their productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely. Such systems...must be resource-conserving, socially supportive, commercially competitive, and environmentally sound.” *John Ikerd*

“Economically viable, environmentally sound, socially just, and humane.”

National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture

“A sustainable agriculture is one that, over the long term, enhances environmental quality and the resource base on which agriculture depends; provides for basic human food & fiber needs; is economically viable; and enhances the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.”

American Society of Agronomy, 1989

“Sustainable agriculture is a system that utilizes an understanding of natural processes along with the latest scientific advances to create integrated, resource-conserving farming systems. These systems will reduce environmental degradation, are economically viable, maintain a stable rural community, and provide a productive agriculture in both the short and the long term.”

North Central Regional Committee on Sustainable Agriculture