

# Sustainability Definitions

## UC Ag and Natural Resources, Sustainable Ag Research and Education Program (SAREP)

<http://www.sarep.ucdavis.edu/concept.htm>

Sustainable agriculture integrates three main goals—environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity. Sustainability rests on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, stewardship of both natural and human resources is of prime importance. A systems perspective is essential to understanding sustainability. The system is envisioned in its broadest sense, from the individual farm, to the local ecosystem, and to communities affected by this farming system both locally and globally. Making the transition to sustainable agriculture is a process. For farmers, the transition to sustainable agriculture normally requires a series of small, realistic steps. Reaching toward the goal of sustainable agriculture is the responsibility of all participants in the system, including farmers, laborers, policymakers, researchers, retailers, and consumers.

## The Albion Statement: Healthy People, Places, and Communities, A 2025 Vision for Michigan's Food and Farming

[http://www.mifooddemocracy.org/documents/Albion\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.mifooddemocracy.org/documents/Albion_Statement.pdf)

Sustainability as it applies to food means that societies pass on to future generations all the elements required to provide healthy food on a regular basis: healthy and diverse environments (soil, water, air, and habitats); healthy, diverse, and freely reproducing seeds, crops, and livestock; and the values, creativity, knowledge, skills, and local institutions that enable societies to adapt effectively to environmental and social changes.

## USDA Co-Op Extension

[http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag\\_systems/in\\_focus/sustain\\_ag\\_if\\_legal.html](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/ag_systems/in_focus/sustain_ag_if_legal.html)

### Legal Definition of Sustainable Agriculture

The term "sustainable agriculture" ([U.S. Code Title 7, Section 3101](#)) means 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 agriculture 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.

That definition is a central element of the [legislation of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\) program](#) of CSREES.

## USDA Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/terms/srb9902.shtml>

The word "sustain," from the Latin *sustinere* (*sus-*, from below and *tenere*, to hold), to keep in existence or maintain, implies long-term support or permanence. As it pertains to agriculture, sustainable describes farming systems that are "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, as quoted by Richard Duesterhaus in "Sustainability's Promise," *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* (Jan.-Feb. 1990) 45(1): p.4. NAL Call # 56.8 J822]

## National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/sustagintro.html>

Sustainable agriculture is one that produces abundant food without depleting the earth's resources or polluting its environment. It is agriculture that follows the principles of nature to develop systems for raising crops and livestock that are, like nature, self-sustaining. Sustainable agriculture is also the agriculture of social values, one whose success is indistinguishable from vibrant rural communities, rich lives for families on the farms, and wholesome food for everyone.