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**Advisory Committee on Sustainable Agriculture
Legislative Council Report**

NDCC §4-01-24, created the Advisory Committee on Sustainable Agriculture. The Advisory Committee on Sustainable Agriculture members were appointed in March of 2010, and include Sen. Terry Wanzek, Rep. Dennis Johnson, Rep. Phillip Mueller, Commissioner of Commerce Shane Goettle, Dr. Ken Grafton, Pat Bresnahan, Mike Keller, and William Bateman. The committee met on July 19, 2010, in the Missouri River Room of the Capitol. The North Dakota Department of Agriculture (NDDA) provided the committee with background information including the legislation, definitions of sustainable agriculture, budget proposals, and potential next steps. Subsection two of the NDCC §4-01-24 assigned specific duties to the committee, which are *italicized* below. Committee comments from the July 19, 2010, meeting are outlined below their respective assigned duty (comments are bulleted).

NDCC 4-01-24 (2)

The committee shall:

- a. *Examine the concept of sustainability with respect to conventional farming practices and modern technology-based production practices;*
 - As farming practices have become more efficient, the carbon footprint in relation to our production has declined. Agriculture producers produce more using less on a per unit basis.
 - Farmers and ranchers should be educated about sustainable agriculture and employ new technology that enables them to become more sustainable.
- b. *Examine production practices that are efficient and able to meet current and future global food and nutritional needs;*
 - Conservation practices and the efficient use of resources have led to agriculture producers' ability to provide more food, feed, fiber, and fuel in our agriculture systems.
- c. *Examine production practices that promote increased efficiencies in resource use, improve human health through access to safe and nutritious food, and enhance economic opportunities for individual producers;*
 - Farming practices, systems, and technology have helped us achieve higher levels of production with greater efficiencies in resource use.

d. Explore metric evaluations to measure the attainment, maintenance, and certification of sustainability;

- Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring has requested and was granted the use of Keystone Alliance's Fieldprint Calculator for the implementation of this program. The Fieldprint Calculator is a tool that can measure a farmer's level of sustainability using metric evaluations.
- The application of the Fieldprint calculator is limited and at present time can only be used for corn, soybeans, and wheat. (Committee members were provided computers to access the online Fieldprint calculator.)

e. Advise the commissioner regarding the development of a sustainability certification program and the marketing and packaging of products containing the certification;

- Process of developing a sustainable agriculture program:
 1. Develop the program and make available the tools used to execute the program.
 2. Branding of the Sustainable Agriculture product.
 3. Domestic and International Market development
- It would be necessary to keep certified sustainable products separated from other production. Can the present grain handling system segregate out certified products?
- Expenses for developing a program would probably be higher than projected. Monitoring to assure program integrity would be costly.
- Would the benefits that the producer receives from the sustainable certification be great enough to ensure producer participation?
- Legislation would be required to provide funding for the program.

f. Explore the standards held by international private sector certifying groups which have the potential to increase sales of North Dakota products.

- International private sector certifying groups focus on input metrics and ignore production (output) levels. Time is needed to study this area in particular.

g. Report to the legislative council on the status of committee activities.

Members of the committee suggested:

- More time is needed to study sustainable agriculture.
- Keep the committee in place but delay implementation of the program for another two years (July 1, 2013). If the legislature agrees to keep the committee in place, funding needs to be made available to adequately study sustainable agriculture.
- Legislation will be needed to either repeal the law or to provide adequate funding for the sustainable agriculture program.
- Schedule another meeting for December of 2010.