



New American Farm Conference

Advancing the Frontiers
of Sustainable Agriculture
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Time to Invite the Next Generation To Join Sustainable Agriculture

KANSAS CITY, MO – When Margaret Krome was a junior in college, she took a summer off to visit her grandmother in Florida.

It was a life-changing experience for Krome, policy program director for the Michael Fields Agriculture Institute in Wisconsin.

Speaking at SARE's 20th anniversary New American Farm Conference in Kansas City March 25-27, Krome recalled how her grandfather, who had donated land to subtropical fruit research, died early, leaving grandmother Krome to raise four kids during the depression.

Upon Krome's summer visit to Florida, her grandmother said, "I hear you like to garden."

"I affirmed it," said Krome, "and the next day she had several yards of soil brought in. She sent me on a botanical trip to the Bahamas. She taught me about compost and how to take advantage of every resource available. She tolerated my mistakes. And I emerged more able and with a passion for agriculture."

Krome explained that her grandmother's principles are important for bringing a new generation into agriculture. "She broadened my interests, she provided resources, she made room for me."

An important way to engage young people today, said Krome, is through jobs, not just in nonprofit organizations and government agencies but also in marketing and education, as



Margaret Krome

farmers and ranchers, as legal advocates and in food services. “There are so many ways and so many places for them.”

Noting a bit of graying among the players and leaders who have shepherded the sustainable movement during its first 20 years, Krome urged removing obstacles for bringing young people into sustainable agriculture.

For instance, there is a strong need for mentoring – on-the-job training. There is a need for more jobs, not only entry-level positions but not-so-entry-level positions. There is a need to help people work their way up.

And she said the old guard needs to submerge its ego.

“It may step on your toes, but you need to be able to let it go,” said Krome.

What are other ways SARE can invite youth into sustainable agriculture? Krome offered these thoughts:

- Encourage new entrants in SARE grants
- Collaborate to open new jobs
- Capture synergies and convene skill training
- Help graduate students invest in graduate student projects
- Invite young people to review grants
- Encourage new entrants on regional administrative councils

“To those of you in the next generation, thank you for coming,” concluded Krome. And to those of the gray generation, “Thank you for intentionally creating room and capacity for the next generation.”