

Simply Sustainable

quarterly newsletter
from Western SARE
working to sustain western agriculture

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Western SARE Program

Phil Rasmussen, Coordinator
Utah State University
Agricultural Science Building
Room 305
4865 Old Main Hill
Logan, Utah 84322-4865
phone: (435) 797-2257
fax: (435) 797-3344
wsare@usu.edu

Western SARE PDP Program:

Jim Freeburn, PDP Coordinator
2753 State Hwy 157
Lingle, Wyoming 82223
phone: (307) 837-2674
fax: (307) 837-2963

<http://wsare.usu.edu>



SUSTAINING CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

VISALIA, Calif. – Priorities that could sustain California agriculture include:

- Conduct feasibility studies on local and regional food distribution, economics, facilities and processing.
- Encourage farmer-to-farmer education, networking and learning opportunities.
- Apply whole-system and interdisciplinary research and education approaches to issues like water conservation, soil and crop nutrients, soil management, conservation, integrated natural resource management and life cycle analyses.

These priorities, along with developing partnerships to engage underserved communities and engaging youth in sustainable agriculture, were



From left, speakers Michael Dimock, John Teixeira and Steve Balling.

among those expressed by participants at the Western SARE California Subregional Conference Dec. 1-3 in Visalia, Calif. The conference was the sixth of seven Western SARE is conducting to showcase SARE accomplishments and elicit grassroots response on the needs and issues that can extend sustainability to the whole of American agriculture. The Western SARE Administrative Council (board of directors) will consider the California priorities, along with those from other subregional con-

ferences, in funding decisions on SARE's competitive grants.

The California priorities (more than 400 separate comments were recorded during facilitated roundtable discussions) reflected comments by guest speakers, invited to share their vision with the nearly 100 conference participants.

Michael Dimock, president of Roots of Change, a 10-year-old NGO working to stimulate development of a sustainable food supply in California by

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AG SUSTAINABILITY APPLIES TO ALL

VISALIA, Calif. – Sustainability in agriculture should be viewed on a higher plane and in a global context, not as an isolated niche.

"I'm troubled by the notion that sustainability applies only to alternative and small agriculture," said Dan Dooley, vice president of the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of California. "It applies to all of agriculture, and we ought to think about it in that context."

"As we look to the future, we see a very diverse range of

food production systems as important to the future of food," he added. "It's critical to the necessary biodiversity in California."

Dooley, delivering the keynote address during the Western SARE California Subregional Conference in Visalia, cited the key issues facing



Dan Dooley

**Happy
Holidays!**
from
Western SARE

agriculture as food safety, accessibility to energy, ensuring growth and jobs and adaptation to climate change.

Indeed, agriculture, he

continued on back page

YOUTH RENEWING RURAL U.S.

On an August afternoon in Moscow, Idaho, "Soil Steward" members head for the fields to pick, pull, dig and gather summer's harvest. This diverse group of students, faculty and community members, founded in 2003 at the University of Idaho, runs a 3-acre certified organic farm on university land.

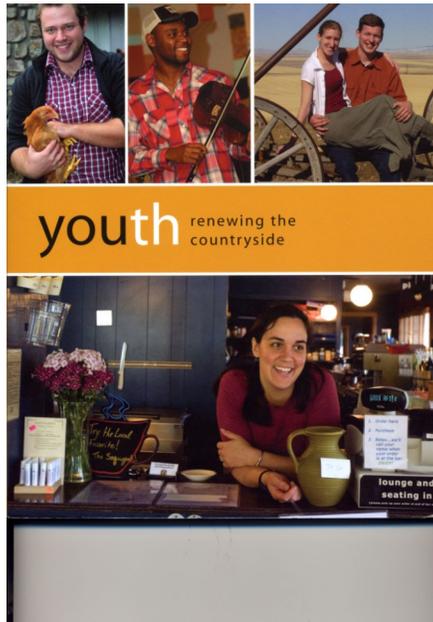
Melissa Matthewson remembers as young girl the fresh taste of produce purchased with her father at the Santa Monica farmers market. Those earlier memories are as fresh as the tomatoes she picks from the 10-acre Barking Moon Farm that she and her husband operate in southern Oregon's Rogue Valley.

In her college sophomore year, Lisa Dardy McGee learned about summer jobs in parks and forests. Following her travel dreams led her to Wyoming and work as a naturalist in Yellowstone National Park. Today, she is the director of the National Parks and Forests Program for the Wyoming Outdoor Council.

The common thread that runs through these stories is that smart young people are returning to the roots of American agriculture – roots steeped in a tradition and culture of diversity, quality, and respect for the Earth.

This return is captured in a new book, "Youth Renewing the Countryside." Filled with colorful photos, the 170-page book shares remarkable stories of young people in each state changing the world through rural renewal.

The book was produced by Renewing the Countryside in partnership with young writers



Reports on SARE and Ag Sustainability

and photographers across the country and with support from SARE and the Center for Rural Strategies.

To order a copy of the book, \$24.95 plus \$5.95 for shipping and handling, visit www.sare.org/WebStore or call 301.374.9696.

Ag professionals looking to help clients make better business planning and marketing decisions will be interested in a new, free online course called "SARE Strategic Farm/Ranch Planning and Marketing Course."

The self-directed course focuses on keeping ag operations sustainable and profitable. It shows clients how to:

- critically assess their future set goals
- find resources to evaluate new ideas
- develop business and marketing plans
- think critically and manage risk

- prepare to meet with lenders and seek financing alternatives
- transfer farms and understand retirement options

To preview the course, to go <http://www.sare.org/coreinfo/ceprogram.htm>.

This is the second course in SARE's National Continuing Education Program. The first is "Sustainable Agriculture: Basic Principles and Concept Overview." Both are offered through eXtension's online campus at <http://campus.extension.org>.

Ask a chef what's hot in 2010 and you'll find out local and sustainable lead the list. That's according to the food trends identified in the National Restaurant Association's chef survey of "What's Hot in 2010."

Locally grown produce ranked No. 1, followed by locally sourced meat and seafood at No. 2 and sustainability at No. 3.

Other trends among the top 20 that might be of interest to ag producers: nutritionally balanced children's dishes (No. 6), farm- or estate-branded ingredients (No. 8), sustainable seafood (No. 10), organic produce (No. 12), nutrition and health (No. 15), simplicity and back to basics (No. 16) and regional ethnic foods (No. 17).

More farmers are turning to sustainable practices, according to Rabobank America's Fall 2009 Farm and Ranch Survey. The survey, including 455 interviews of producers grossing over \$250,000, found that 64% are using direct seed, 42% are minimizing crop chemicals, 39% are using crop rotation or diversification, 39% are reducing energy use and 22% are conserving water.

Smart young people are returning to the roots of American Agriculture — roots steeped in a tradition and culture of diversity, quality and respect for the Earth.

SARE: RIGHT TOOL, RIGHT TIME

As I pause to write this column, the New Year swiftly approaches, bringing to mind the countless positive outcomes that we have accomplished and observed at the Western SARE Center during the past 12 months.

2009 brought an end to my assignment as the Interim National Director of SARE and began our fruitful association with Dr. Rob Hedberg as the new Interim National Program Leader for Sustainable Agriculture and Director of the National SARE Program.

In addition, the entire Western Region SARE staff worked tirelessly to complete two subregional conferences, one in Spokane, Wash., the other in Visalia, Calif. The positive outcomes of the subregional conferences have been numerous, both long-term benefits to all future Calls for Proposals that radiate from the Western SARE Program and immediate benefits from the targeted CFPs that have gone out within two weeks of each subregional conference.

The subregional conferences have also allowed the Western SARE Program to showcase many of the singular results of the program (in posters, handouts and lists of funded proposals). It has been humbling to review the number of proposals Western SARE has funded over the past 20 years in every state and in the island protectorates of the Pacific Basin.

Many important outcomes were not originally planned by either Western SARE staff or the Administrative Council (our congressionally specified board of directors), including:

- The massive networking between the attendees of the conferences. Numerous proposals have been received by the SARE Program that have been an obvious outcome of the networking that took place at the conferences.
- The starting of a conver-



Western SARE Coordinator's Column

Dr. V. Philip Rasmussen

sation between previous antagonists (proponents of conventional agriculture and sustainable agriculture).

There have also been significant implications for the long term. SARE has made many new friends across the region. And Western SARE has been shown to be a serious force for sustaining agriculture as well as in research and education efforts in sustainable agriculture. Clearly, SARE has been a force to ensure the enduring future of agriculture across the United States and the isles of the Pacific.

One respondent to our evaluation survey at the subregional conferences stated:

"This is a time of huge crisis in all three legs of sustainability – environment, economy, social equity/community justice. Therefore, (it is) a time of tremendous opportunity. In my opinion, SARE needs to kick it up several notches. SARE thinks too small and asks for too little. It's time to be bigger and bolder. SARE has a mindset of scarcity. It's time for it to come out of its TINY closet at USDA. It needs to create new alliances and partnerships. It needs to seriously reinvent itself so it can have much more of an impact and significant influence at a time that is begging for strong leadership

and new direction."

Another respondent said:

"Sustainability applies to all agriculture...(I am) glad to hear SARE has affirmed this here at this conference and that SARE should not be focused just on small farmers and ag operations, and only local producers. We are all in this together."

These are amazing outcomes and survey results to contemplate. As I reflect upon my association with SARE over almost 22 years, I have observed the steady growth of SARE from my initial association as a reviewer of proposals, to my efforts with the first sustainable agriculture networking committee (SAN) and, finally, leading the Western Region SARE program at the Western Region's host institution. I am so grateful for my association with the SARE Program. I count it as one of the most significant opportunities and highlights of my life.

At this New Year season, I wish to extend my best wishes to all of you, who have supported the Western SARE program through thick and thin, for the New Year. It is likely that the New Year will bring serious efforts at the national level to further increase SARE's resources. The right time is now. We are at the right place, at the right time, with the right tool (SARE). Our subregional conferences have clearly shown that we have a portfolio of significant research and outstanding outreach efforts. Western SARE has consistently demonstrated that both research and education are important outcomes.

This next year will bring about a new thrust from our advocates to increase SARE's resources and to fund the long-awaited matching grants programs at centers of sustainable agriculture research. We deeply appreciate your continued support as we move toward this new era in sustainable agriculture in the U.S. and abroad.

"Sustainability applies to all agriculture...(I am) glad to hear SARE has affirmed this here at this conference and that SARE should not be focused just on small farmers and ag operations, and only local producers. We are all in this together."

— Subregional
Conference Survey
Respondent

SUSTAINING CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURE

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2030, said he's "pleasantly surprised" at the progress being made in sustaining agriculture.

"The train has left the station," said Dimock. "Larger agricultural interests are lowering their resistance and people are figuring out how to engage and embrace."

He noted a "cultural divide" that needs to be overcome between urban and rural and between sustainable and traditional."

"That divide is in place, and we should focus on translating resistance into partnerships to mitigate the impacts of the divide on our goals."

Dimock said few people in America have any idea about the complexity of how their food is produced.

"That story can wake up the American public. People have to understand how you make their lives possible." He added that people's understanding of agriculture can be aided by bringing some of the sociological elements into SARE research.

John Teixeira, owner of Lone Willow Ranch in Firebaugh, producing certified organic crops like tomatoes, cotton and melons, said that educating youth can help enhance Americans' understanding of where their food comes from.

"We need to get into the schools," Teixeira said. "It's important that we get good healthy food to young people. We also really need to educate the teachers...education that speaks in simple terms."

He advised a practical approach to outreach.

"Take the time to visit small communities," said Teixeira. "Get some dirt on your shoes and see what's out there. We (farmers) are always changing, which we must do to survive."

Teixeira, who operates in a community that's 90 percent



Rob Hedberg, director of the National SARE program, left, consults with Jerry DeWitt, conference moderator and former director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa.

"You cannot manage a farm from the corporate boardroom. Nobody understands better than the grower on the ground."

- *Steve Balling of Del Monte*

Hispanic, said that as a farmer, he needs to understand his community members' needs, and he nudged SARE to improve their own understanding of different cultures.

Steven Balling, director of Agricultural and Analytical Services for Del Monte Foods, noted that Del Monte is a sustainable company, citing its efforts to develop products responsibly, decrease the impact of its packaging, reduce the energy footprint of its facilities and partner with growers. On the latter point, Balling said all ag is local and that nothing is accomplished without grower understanding, buy-in and support.

"You cannot manage a farm from the corporate boardroom. Nobody understands better than the grower on the ground."

He observed that the future of agriculture will be a blended system that doesn't reject anything - sustainability will require contributions from conventional and organic, biotech and traditional.

Balling concluded by enumerating what he sees as challenges for agriculture and its sustainability.

- What's the role of SARE and sustainable growers in feeding the world? How do you feed 12 million people in Los Angeles, for example, with local agriculture?

- What can conventional agriculture learn from sustainable agriculture, and how can we blur the distinction between them?
- How do you build a better model for matching ag production and consumer needs? Balling noted that 25 percent of what goes to groceries is wasted and that there is a tremendous amount of waste in our food system.
- Who will be our future farmers? The average age of farmers continues to rise, and Balling doesn't see a lot of young people on the farm.
- How can we reverse the trend of ag's eroding infrastructure, for example the loss of extension and ARS at universities? "All of the things that made agriculture great we're losing."
- How do we measure our success along the journey? "We do a poor job of measuring what we've done, measuring whether we are succeeding."
- How do we derail "The End of Agriculture in the American Portfolio," as stated in the title of a 1998 book. "I don't want our food (production) to go to China, but it will if we don't do a better job of being competitive."

Pressures and Priorities Posited for California Ag

The importance of California agriculture cannot be overstated: with nearly \$37 billion in annual cash receipts, California production dwarfs that of Texas and Iowa, which rank second and third with around \$19 billion each.

Despite its size, the ag industry is changing. The number of California farms has shrunk in the last 10 years to 75,000 from 87,000, while land in farms has dropped 2 million acres to 26.2 million.

Morgan Doran, University of California Extension farm advisor in Solano County and Western SARE California State Coordinator, cited several issues that must be addressed to sustain the state's agriculture, including water quality and quantity, land use/conversion, ag infrastructure, regulations (California, he said has the most highly regulated ag of any state), labor, energy costs, succession, profitability and state's perilous financial situation. Doran made his comments in painting a portrait of his state's ag during Western SARE conference in Visalia Dec. 1-3.

Lori Berger, chair of the conference site committee and executive director of the California Specialty Crops Council, in welcoming conference participants, observed that her hometown of Visalia exemplifies what's happening in California and the Central Valley and how growth is impacting agriculture. She observed that Visalia's population, just 60,000 some 20 years ago, has mushroomed to 150,000 today, with growing neighborhoods bumping up against agriculture.

Berger said the California Specialty Crops Council, which represents nearly 20 crops, is among many entities working to bring people together to sustain agriculture.

"I believe across the board

that growers want to sustain the environment," said Berger. "We need to create bridges to bring all elements, large and small, together for the betterment of agriculture. The status quo isn't going to work. We need to be creative and we need to be collaborative."

Doran and Berger played key roles in planning the conference along with Hunter Francis of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Pete Goodell, UC-Kearney Ag Center and Tom Tomich, UC-Davis Sustainable Ag Institute. Also assisting were Western SARE Administrative Council members from California, Stacie Clary of Roots of Change and Rick Melnicoe of the UC-Davis Western IPM Center.



Lori Berger, chair of the conference site committee, and Western SARE Coordinator Phil Rasmussen.

The conference, the sixth of seven Western SARE is conducting in its expansive region, brought more than 70 key players in California's agriculture industry to Visalia to share SARE's successful funded grant projects. Twenty-seven posters (a sampling of the 124 grants funded in California since SARE began in 1988) showcased project impacts. (To view or download these posters and handouts that go with them, go to the Western SARE website, <http://wsare.usu.edu> and click on 'Conferences.')

Equally important, the conference was designed to ask participants what issues they



Morgan Doran

see as critical for sustaining and promoting California agriculture. To elicit that input, participants pondered six "burning questions," sharing their ideas at facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions. A total of 450 separate comments were recorded, and the priorities emerged through consensus. (See the table on page 6.) The tabletop discussions were followed by reports from each table, including these:

Deborah Giraud, a UC Extension farm advisor from Humboldt County, said she's observed a trend toward community and school gardens and farm-to-school and farm-to-institution projects. She suggested that SARE fund such projects, analyze who's doing it and craft models for others to follow.

George Work, a rancher from Paso Robles, agreed that California needs a "more resilient food system," one that goes beyond traditional production. He noted that Victory Gardens during World War II provided 40 percent of the nation's vegetables.

Steve Schwartz of California FarmLink in Sebastopol, an organization that assists beginning and underserved farmers, urged SARE to bring the voices of these people to the table, engaging partners that have connections to underserved audiences for better outreach.

"We need to create bridges to bring all elements, large and small, together for the betterment of agriculture. The status quo isn't going to work."

— Lori Berger of the California Specialty Crops Council

Pressures and Priorities Posited for California Ag

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Steve Schwartz



George Work



Leah Smith



Rebecca Thistlewaite



Josh Redden

Leah Smith, who works with Marin Farmers Markets, suggested research on integrated farming systems, looking at things like energy, soil and water altogether. She'd also like more research that reports on the risks and benefits of farming.

Smith urged more consumer education, especially about local foods and local food production. And she said education should acknowledge the value and contribution to the ecosystem from natural and ag systems.

Rebecca Thistlewaite of LC Ranch near Santa Cruz observed that California's agricultural is a "very bifurcated system," with the wealthy looking for good food and the rest looking for cheap calories, a divide she said needs to be addressed.

Josh Redden, a sheep producer from Sonoma County, noted that the livestock industry is losing infrastructure. In particular, he pointed to auction yards, without which his business can't survive. Redden is also concerned about the next generation.

"What we're missing is the encouragement of getting more people into farming," he said. "We need to promote agricultural as a noble profession."

The theme of attracting new farmers was continued by Mary Kimball, executive director of the Center for Land-Based Learning in Winters.

"If we don't have new farmers coming in, where is the sustainability?" she asked. "We have people coming to us on a regular basis. They need support, resources, community support and infrastructure. This has got to be the focus of the future — that's our highest priority."

Dan Munk, UC Extension farm advisor for Fresno County, emphasized the need for placing abstracts of SARE project results into industry

and extension newsletters. And he suggested increased collaboration on grants, including small teams working together on a grant to share the load of its administration. In addition, he'd like a SARE website that's topic-based rather than regionally based — erase the geographic boundaries.

The Western SARE Administrative Council members attending, 10 in all, listened intently to the tabletop reporters.

Deborah Young, AC chair and director of Colorado State University Extension, observed that while Western SARE must retain a focus on production, it also needs to consider grants that focus on social systems, marketing and economics, all parts of the sustainability equation.

Stacie Clary, incoming AC chair who works with Rural

Roots in California, said she valued the discussion.

"I heard so many good ideas, it's hard for me because I want to fund them all," Clary said, adding that she agrees with the need for more research that takes both systems and a holistic approach to issues.



Deborah Giraud



Mary Kimball



Dan Munk

Some California Priorities

(in response to six 'burning questions')

1. Needs for stronger local and regional food systems

- Feasibility studies and research on distribution, economics, storage and processing
- Education of ag groups by funding marketing, outreach and holistic approaches

2. Local and regional consumption and production trends

- Higher demand for sustainable and organic food
- Higher demand for local and seasonal foods

3. Getting SARE research results to farmers and ranchers

- Improve web sites
- Engender farmer-to-farmer education and learning
- Use existing infrastructure and groups for communicating SARE information and opportunities
- Use more contemporary form electronic outreach

4. Type of research is needed over the next 10 years

- Water availability, conservation, efficiency, crop use
- Social projects like farm succession and beginning farmers
- Renewable energy, alternative fuels and carbon sequestration

5. Projects to emphasize if Western SARE had \$1 million more

- Longer-term and larger grants for interdisciplinary systems research on such things as whole systems and life cycle analyses
- Energy research, alternative fuels, carbon credit banks
- Enhance education for beginning farmers

6. Assisting underserved or socially disadvantaged groups

- Partner with local underserved organizations and associations
- Conduct grant-writing workshops and make mentors available

4-H TRAINING ON MANAGING MANURE

When it comes to teaching the prudent stewardship of agricultural resources, there's nothing like starting early.

That's the path Jessica Davis took with her Western SARE Professional Development Program grant, "Manure Management: An Essential Component of 4-H Livestock Projects."

Davis is a professor at Colorado State University responsible for the Environmental Soils Extension and Research Program for Colorado. She noted in her SARE grant that while EPA regulations infer that most 4-H livestock projects could be classified as Animal Feeding Operations, EPA is unlikely to inspect such projects.

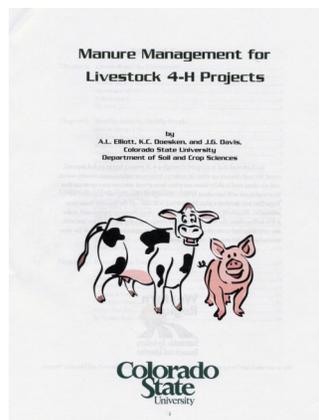
But that presents an opportunity to educate these future livestock producers in the essentials of managing manure.

"When the principles of good nutrient management are introduced early in youths' lives," the project report says, "they are more likely to practice these principles in their adult lives."

The audience for such education is larger than might be expected. In the western states, at least 142,000 youth are involved in 4-H livestock projects – 13,700 in Colorado alone.

Davis is well equipped for the educational challenge. Her research and extension programs emphasize using manure to improve soil properties while protecting water quality and economically and environmentally sound use of fertilizer. She has worked with feedlot, dairy, swine, layer and broiler manures to determine optimum application methods and rates while protecting the quality of

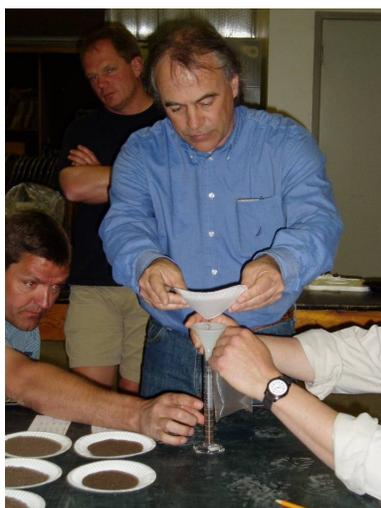
Western SARE Grant Profile



ground and surface water.

Her Western SARE Professional Development Grant sought to develop a Manure Management Curriculum for 4-H livestock participants, along with a helper's guide to provide learn-by-doing activities. The idea was to use the materials to train 4-H leaders and volunteers in use of the curriculum and guide.

Drafts of the curriculum were presented in 2007 to 4-H agents as well as youth members, then edited and revised by experienced 4-H agents Kip Nye and Tom



The 4-H guide features hands-on activities to help train 4-H agents, leaders and volunteers in the ins and outs of manure management.

McBride.

The guide, "Manure Management for 4-H Livestock Projects," was written by Davis, A.L. Elliott and K.C. Doesken, all with the Colorado State University Department of Soil and Crop Sciences. The publication follows this outline:

- Chapter 1, Livestock and the Community
- Chapter 2, Healthy Animals, Healthy People
- Chapter 3, Where Does Our Water Come From?
- Chapter 4, Protecting Air Quality
- Chapter 5, The Art and Science of Composting
- Chapter 6, What Is Economics
- Chapter 7, Putting Your Manure to Work.

Both the curriculum and guide have been posted at www.manuremanagement.info. In addition, the information has been promoted to a national audience, and each state 4-H office in the West received 10 CDs of the curriculum.

In the short term, potential benefits of the project are an enhanced awareness among western extension 4-H agents of environmental issues related to livestock production and increased knowledge of manure management practices. As agents' skills improve, they are spreading their knowledge to 4-H leaders, members and volunteers.

This, in turn, is helping them encourage youth participating in 4-H livestock projects to make choices for the appropriate management of animal waste.

To learn more about the project, visit the SARE website at www.sare.org. Under 'Project Reports' go to 'Search SARE Projects' and enter EW05-015 under 'Search Terms.'



Jessica Davis

"When the principles of good nutrient management are introduced early in youths' lives, they are more likely to practice these principals in their adult lives."

— Western SARE
Grant EW05-015



Western SARE
Utah State University
Ag Science Bldg, Room 305
4865 Old Main Hill
Logan, UT 84322-4865

Editor: Ron Daines
(435) 755-5749

rdaines@msn.com

Design: Jolyn Keck
(435) 797-2257



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and Education Program

PAY ATTENTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

said, is extremely vulnerable to climate change.

"High temperatures will reduce yields of desirable crops and cause weed and pest proliferation," said Dooley. "Changes in precipitation patterns will increase the likelihood of short-run crop failures and long-range production declines."

Climate change, he said, will have the greatest impact on areas that are the least food secure, and South Asia will be particularly hard hit. In developing countries, half the people receive their livelihood from agriculture, and calorie production will decline throughout the developing world.

Despite the hardships climate change will impose on food production worldwide, Dooley said it also creates opportunities for U.S. agriculture.

"Enhanced food security and climate change adapta-

tion go hand in hand," he said, noting that U.S. agriculture is capable of developing the technology to sustainably produce more on less.

Dooley said sustainable food systems recognize the multi-functionality of agriculture, which can simultaneously meet development and sustainability goals while increasing agricultural production.

"We need to get rid of the either-or idea," he said. "We need to improve productivity using technology and science and decrease impacts on the environment."

He also sees more potential for urban agriculture, noting that the more we can keep people connected to how food is grown the better.

Dooley cited what he sees as agricultural stakeholder priorities in California:

- Competition of water and water-use efficiency.

- Farmland preservation.
- Viability of small and mid-size farming operations.
- Climate change.
- Public understanding of challenges to sustainable food and agriculture systems.

"We should think of sustainability not as a problem but as a dynamic system that can solve our problems. There are a variety of opportunities that people should think about. We should refuse to be defined by the past. We need to embrace change and diversity and welcome opportunities and challenges.

"We in agriculture need to look at what people are demanding and how we can meet that demand," Dooley said. "I'm very excited about the future of agriculture. I'm optimistic about California agriculture. At the university, it's our job to help you respond to the opportunities."