

Simply Sustainable

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from Western SARE

working to sustain western agriculture

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

<i>Grants Approved</i>	2
<i>Sub-Regional</i>	2
<i>Stumping for SARE</i>	3
<i>Center of Attention</i>	4
<i>New Publications</i>	4
<i>Spreading the Word</i>	5
<i>WSARE in the News</i>	6
<i>Full Belly Farm</i>	7

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KUPERS CHAIRS SARE AC

Karl Kupers of Harrington, Wash., has taken the reins as chair of the Administrative Council of the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. He succeeds Colorado rancher Mark Frasier, who has served in various Western SARE committees since 1993.

Kupers, a former eastern Washington wheat and alternative crops producer, is currently a market director for Shepherd's Grain. He was appointed in the spring of 2003 as the sustainable farmer representative on the council, became chair-elect in 2004 and officially took over his duties last October at the AC meeting in Tucson.

"Karl has shown, as few have done previously, that sustainably grown commodities can be marketed as successfully as organic," said Phil



Mark Frasier with Lobo at Frasier Farms in Colorado.

Rasmussen, Western SARE coordinator. "His well-honed experience brings to the table, as never before, the bridge-building materials and skills to draw all farmers and ranchers closer to sustainability."

Rasmussen met Kupers in 1997 during a tour of his farm. Kupers was conducting a Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant that he credits with bringing him to his current role as a wheat marketer. Impressed with Kupers and his SARE work testing no-till, cool-season grass rotations in a 16-inch precipitation zone, Rasmussen suggested him as a speaker for the first national SARE Conference in Austin, Texas.

In Austin, Kupers began his speech: "I'm a big farm, chemical-using, big tractor, profit-motivated and (some would say) polluting farmer, and you're all tree-hugging, small farming, organic-oriented environmental nuts." Rasmussen said the audience went quiet. "But we have things in common," Kupers continued. "We are moving together as we gradually change farming as we know it, and we need to talk. So let's agree to start the dialogue."

From there, said Rasmussen, Kupers kept the whole group in the palm of his hand. "It was a moment of pure magic in the sustainable agriculture movement."

For his part, Kupers acknowledges that he has large shoes to fill in succeeding his friend and occasional golf opponent Frasier.

"Mark's executive skills are on a par with any CEO," said Rasmussen. "As a young leader, he will have major

impacts on sustainability of farms and, especially, ranches for years to come. He likes to hear every viewpoint



Karl Kupers, left, and Phil Rasmussen during this year's winter Administrative Council meetings in Salt Lake City.

yet runs meetings as efficiently as any leader I've observed. He was on the council not for what it could bring to Colorado, rather for the region as a whole."

Frasier, who will continue an advisory role on the AC Executive Committee, is the business manager for his family's livestock operation, Frasier Farms, in eastern Colorado. They produce calves and feeder cattle on native range, and retain ownership of beef cattle through finishing. Off the ranch, Frasier is involved in other local business pursuits, including serving as a director of the Fort Morgan State Bank.

Kupers and his wife, Lexie, began farming in 1973. At the

...continued on page 2

COMPETITIVE GRANTS FUNDED

The Western SARE Administrative Council, at its meeting in Salt Lake City ending March 2, approved funding for 36 competitive grants totaling \$1.9 million. Contracts are now being finalized, and the funds will be disbursed shortly.

The council approved nine Research and Education Grants totaling \$1.2 million;

13 Farmer/Rancher Grants totaling \$159,000; seven Professional + Producer Grants totaling \$130,000; and seven Professional Development Program Grants totaling \$406,000.

With the 2007 funding, Western SARE has now distributed more than \$40 million in grants to about 1,000 recipients since the SARE

program was begun nearly 20 years ago in 1988.

The 2008 requests for applications are now available. Copies of the RFAs, and deadlines for application submission, can be obtained from the Western SARE website, <http://wsare.usu.edu>, by calling (435) 797-2257 or by emailing wsare@ext.usu.edu.

SUB-REGIONAL CONFERENCES FUNDED

Two applications have been approved for sub-regional conferences in the Western Region.

Bob Barber, Guam professional development coordinator, submitted a successful application for a Pacific region conference, covering the island protectorates, tentatively scheduled for October on Guam.

Dennis Lamm, state SARE coordinator for Colorado, was among those submitting a second approved application that proposes to hold two mountain region conferences early next year, one planned for Wyoming to include the northern area and another in New Mexico or Colorado for the southern area. The project

team also includes John Allen (North-Central SARE AC alumni) and Jim Dyer (Western SARE AC alumni).

The conferences are designed to review the past accomplishments of the Western SARE program and to gather stakeholder input regarding the future of SARE and agricultural sustainability.

As the sub-regional conference goals, the RFA states that applicants should "identify and prioritize emerging and unmet research and education needs in sustainable food, fiber and energy systems, and increase stakeholder and policyholder awareness of the accomplishments of the Western SARE program and its projects."

At its winter conference, the Western SARE Administrative Council opted to keep the funding option on the table for additional sub-regional conferences. Other sub-regions in SARE's Western Region currently being targeted for additional applications include California, Hawaii and the Pacific Northwest, including Alaska. The request for applications is available through the Western SARE office, 435.797.2257 or wsare@ext.usu.edu. The deadline for submission is July 3, 2007, and conferences must be completed by May 2009. .

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...continued from page 1

peak of their operation, they oversaw 5,600 acres of dry-land agriculture 50 miles west of Spokane and 700 irrigated acres in the Columbia Basin. They grew hard red and hard white varieties and added safflower, mustard and sunflowers, all with the idea of targeting market niches.

In 1996, Kupers used his Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant to help his K&J Farms make the transition to a direct-seed (no-till), annual-

crop and intense rotation system. He said the new system reduced wind and water erosion and improved soil tilth, production and weed control.

Kupers advocates that Western SARE research be farmer-driven and visionary. As evidence of his own vision, he was involved in solidifying the first agricultural land carbon sequestration market for Pacific Northwest direct seed producers. He also co-

founded, served as president and is a lifetime member of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association.

Kupers received a bachelor of pharmacy degree from Washington State University in 1971 and is a 1982 graduate of the Washington Agriculture and Forestry Education Leadership Foundation.

STUMPING FOR SARE

Two passionate proponents of agricultural sustainability, Larry Thompson and Karl Kupers, provided a one-two punch on behalf of SARE and sustaining agriculture during Feb. 10 hearings on the Farm Bill in Portland.

Thompson operates Thompson Farms in Boring, Oregon, and is former chair of the Western SARE Administrative Council. Kupers, a market director for Shepherd's Grain, is the current Administrative Council chair. They were in-



Larry Thompson, owner-operator of Thompson Farms in Boring, Oregon, has been speaking on behalf of sustaining agriculture around the Pacific Northwest.

invited to a daylong Farm Bill Forum at Portland State University set up by the office of Oregon Rep. Earl Blumenauer, who was joined by his colleague, Rep. Sam Farr of California.

Thompson, asked to speak about urban agriculture opportunities, told the congressmen that "if you want to protect farmland from development, you ought to be protecting farmers."

When a comment was raised about setting up regions to help allocate government funds to farmers and ranchers, Kupers took the opportunity to explain how SARE already has such a regional structure in place.

"Overall," said Thompson, "SARE was mentioned 13 times during the hearing."

Thompson described some of his other activities on behalf of sustaining agriculture as a member of the Western SARE Alumnus. In June, he accepted an invitation to speak about sustaining agriculture to the Oregon League of Women Voters. "They packed the room

and had great questions," he said. In July, he spoke to the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, discussing the world view of sustainability.

Also last year, Katy Koba, Oregon Commissioner of Agriculture, asked Thompson to



speaking on direct marketing of agricultural commodities to the Oregon Board of Agriculture. He agreed to open his books, and showed them that not only can farmers make money with direct marketing, you can pay it out in good wages to your workers. Thompson showed them a copy of the *New American Farmer*, a publication of the SARE's Sustainable Agriculture Network. Bottom line, they invited him to make a presentation to the Oregon Legislature.

"If you want to protect farmland from development, you ought to be protecting farmers," Larry Thompson told two United States representatives in Portland.

SCHOOLS ADOPT ORGANIC, SUSTAINABLE DISCIPLINES

Colorado State University and Utah State University are taking new initiatives to help students explore organic and sustainable agriculture.

At Colorado State, the "Interdisciplinary Program in Organic Agriculture," begun in the fall of 2006, allows students to complete a degree in any major with an option to take additional courses to satisfy the program's requirements.

A pamphlet describing the program said it builds on a base of fundamental agricultural sciences with additional courses specifically focused

on organic agriculture production techniques and decision-making.

"This effort has been in the works for several years, and it's now coming to fruition, so it's an exciting time," said Dennis Lamm, Colorado state coordinator for Western SARE.

Utah State has opened a tenure track position in "Organic/Sustainable Agriculture" to focus on research related to cropping systems that are organic, sustainable or both.

The candidate who fills the position, 75% research and

25% teaching, will develop a research program that looks at things like plant nutrition and soil fertility; use of compost, crop rotations or related technologies; and evaluation of new crops and cropping systems.

Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE coordinator, said USU's relations with national SARE and Western SARE staff, especially of Bob Newhall, Utah state coordinator for Western SARE, helped in getting the organic/sustainable position approved.

THE CENTER OF ATTENTION

Western SARE could soon be elevated in status to become the Western Center for Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education at Utah State University. The advancement would place Western SARE on more permanent footing with the university's administration, controller, sponsored programs office (contracts), physical plant and other areas.

The process to become a center was initiated last year when the Western SARE host institution was reviewed by a three-member team of the Administrative Council. Western SARE regional coordinator Phil Rasmussen, with staff support, embraced the recommendation from the review team, a recommendation the council passed unanimously at its October 2006 business meeting.

To date, the center status had been approved by the Utah State University faculty, deans, directors, vice president of research and provost. As of this newsletter, the application was awaiting final approval as part of the consent agenda of the USU Board of Trustees meeting, scheduled for April 13, 2007.

If the change is approved, Rasmussen's title will change to director from coordinator, which will allow him to deal with key administrators at USU on a stronger footing. His title as regional coordinator will remain intact with SARE's National Office and USDA-CSREES. "It's much like being 'knighted' in England," he said. "The designation may be significant but no increase in pay accompanies the title."

The change will benefit Western SARE generally and make it easier to keep the

paperwork flowing more expeditiously, said Rasmussen. It also gives stronger status to the other members of the USU SARE team and strengthens the bonds of their full-time contracts with USU, which he said adds to the morale of the total SARE team.



The central administration building, "Old Main," on the campus of Utah State University.

"It's much like being 'knighted' in England. The designation may be significant but no increase in pay accompanies the title," said Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE coordinator.

NEW PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

A new 16-page bulletin, *Rangeland Management Strategies*, is now available from the Sustainable Agriculture Network.



The bulletin features innovative SARE-funded research on creating and sustaining a healthy range, with much of the focus on the Western Region. Researchers and

ranchers share successes in setting goals, managing forage and other vegetation, guarding riparian areas, winter grazing and multi-species grazing as a way to manage weeds.

SAN has recently updated another bulletin, *Marketing Strategies for Farmers and Ranchers*.

This 20-page bulletin offers snapshots of the many alternatives to marketing commodities through conventional channels. It spotlights innovative, SARE-funded research into a range of marketing options including farmers markets, CSA, tourism, direct-marketing meat, season extension, value-added, sales to restaurants, public campaigns, Internet and more.

Both free bulletins can be downloaded from the SAN

website, www.sare.org.

Another recent publication, *Targeted Grazing: A natural approach to vegetation management and landscape enhancement*, features several SARE-funded projects that explore the use of livestock to manage vegetation.

The handbook discusses targeted grazing on grasses, weeds, forests, orchards and in agronomic situations and includes prescriptions for specific plants, business plans, labor requirements and guidelines for developing and carrying out contracts.

Copies of the handbook, at \$25, can be ordered from the American Sheep Industry at 303.771.3500, ext. 32, or by emailing info@sheepusa.org.

SPREADING THE WORD

SARE staff members are frequently invited to share SARE program results and to conduct grant-writing seminars. Here are few recent examples of successful SARE outreach activities.

California Farm Conference, March 4-6, Monterey, California

More than 300 people attended this conference, described by organizers as the "state's premier gathering of small farmers and those who support them." The theme for this 20th annual conference was "The Time is Ripe," the idea being that consumers are clamoring to buy locally produced food.

Bob Newhall, deputy coordinator, made a presentation as part of a panel on "Using USDA Grants to Build and Diversify Farming Operations." Asked to prepare enough handouts for 40 session attendees, Newhall said the overflow crowd of more than 80 was hungry for information about sustaining agriculture and SARE's grant programs.

"There were lots of questions about whether their specific ideas would work for grants – all of them would," said Newhall, who educated them about submitting their ideas around what Western SARE wants and molding them into what is required in the request for applications. The role of the technical advisor, especially related to electronic reporting, was also discussed, as was the potential for a sub-regional SARE conference. "They were glad to hear about California needing to step up to the plate (to sponsor a conference)," he said, "and said they would encourage groups to apply."

Eco-Farm 2007, Jan. 24-28, 2007, Pacific Grove, California

The Ecological Farming Association of Watsonville, Calif., sponsors the annual Eco-Farm conference, one of the largest of its type anywhere, with attendance this year estimated at 1,500.

Our hour-and-a-half panel, "Tools for Farm Change and Growth: Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grants" was set up by associate PDP training coordinator Al Kurki. The panel was moderated by former AC member Sandy Halstead and featured four Farmer/Rancher Grant recipients: Annie Main of Capay, Calif., Helge Hellberg of Point Reyes, Calif., Henning Sehmsdorf of Lopez Island, Wash., and Jeanne and Dan Carver of Maupin, Ore.

Their presentations ranged from humorous to philosophical to emotional to an overflow crowd of 40, many of whom lingered long after the session was finished. Kurki said word of mouth brought many curious people to the SARE exhibit the next day.

"Thanks for the opportunity," said Hellberg. "I enjoyed my time and felt we got the idea of Western SARE and what can be accomplished across to the audience."

Said Jeanne Carver,



Jeanne Carver of Maupin, Oregon, spoke at Eco-Farm about her Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant.

"Thanks you to everyone at SARE for including us in this workshop. I came from the entire experience inspired by all the wonderful presentations, knowledge and expertise that was shared."

Far West Agribusiness Association 2007 Fertilizer and Chemical Conference, Jan. 8-10, Jackpot, Nevada

Idaho organic farmer Richard Parrott and University of Idaho scientific aide Chod Stephens joined Western SARE coordinator Phil Rasmussen on a panel to discuss a topic unusual for the conference sponsor – organic agriculture.

Rasmussen said the panel, the last event of the conference, was attended by about 50 people, who remained long after the presentations to ask questions like, "We have growers who want to know about organic production. What can I do to help them?"

Stephens, based in Idaho Falls, helped to raise awareness by offering as an example a Western SARE Grant on growing organic potatoes. Stephens said the organic cropping system can work from a nitrogen and disease standpoint by lengthening the potato rotation to at least three years and raising alfalfa or alfalfa and grain in between.

Parrott, a Western SARE Administrative Council member, explained from personal experience the challenges and pitfalls in growing and marketing organic products like the vegetables, beef and pork he raises on his farm near Twin Falls.

A representative from the Idaho Department of Agriculture discussed organic certification, and Rasmussen provided an overview of Western SARE and its grant programs.

"I came from the entire (Eco-Farm) experience inspired by all the wonderful presentations, knowledge and expertise that was shared," said Western SARE panel member Jeanne Carver.

...continued on page 8

WESTERN SARE IN THE NEWS

Western SARE and its grant recipients are continually being featured in newspapers and magazines across the region. Here is just a smattering of recent reports.

Deborah Walton of Canvas Ranch a few miles west of Petaluma, California, conducted a 2004 Farmer/Rancher Grant (FW04-028) to



Deborah Walton and her Babydoll sheep were featured on a national CBS television broadcast and in the *Capital Press*.

see whether a short breed of sheep, Miniature Babydoll Southdown, would graze down weeds in vineyards without damaging the grapes.

Last year, CBS television reporter John Blackstone featured Walton and her sheep on national news eating weeds in the Navarro Winery in the Anderson Valley northeast of the famed Napa and Sonoma valleys. The segment showed the Baby Doll sheep grazing the weeds without nipping the grapes, thanks to their short stature. It concludes with the sheep being rounded up by Grace the border collie and being taking back to Canvas Ranch for breeding. To see the story, go to http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/i_video/main500251.shtml?id=2208766n

Walton's sheep were also

featured in a Feb. 17, 2007, article on page 10 in the *Capital Press*, a Pacific Northwest regional weekly newspaper covering agriculture.

The *Capital Press* ran a recent article on the results from bean breeding trials by **Shree Singh**, University of Idaho bean breeder who conducted a Western SARE Research and Education project in 2002 on bean cultivars for sustainable farming (SW02-038). The article discusses several new varieties, the first offerings from the UI program since Singh took over the breeding program in Twin Falls in 1998.

Don Bustos, new Western SARE Administrative Council member from Espanola, New Mexico, is featured in a 25-minute audio interview sponsored by the publication *Edible Santa Fe*, a quarterly magazine that promotes and celebrates the abundance of local foods in north central New Mexico.

The interview, available at www.ediblesantafe.com as part of the Winter 2006 issue, talks with Bustos about his farm and the Western SARE Farmer/Rancher Grant (FW05-011) he received to create solar powered radiant heat for his winter greenhouses, allowing him to grow and sell produce year round without the use of fossil fuels. Bustos' family began farming the land 400 years ago when it was deeded to them by the King of Spain.

Another new Administrative Council member, **Chuck Boerner** who operates Ono Organic Farm in Hana Maui, had photographs of his farm and information about his farm tours in the February issue of *Sunset* magazine. While the article was mainly about "Heavenly Hana" and the picturesque highway that snakes along the coast, it also featured a large photo of ap-

ple bananas growing at Ono Organic and a listing of the tours and tastings from "Hana's cornucopia." If you're visiting Maui, give Boerner a call at 808.248.7779 to set up a tour. In addition to farming and consulting, Boerner is an avid surfer, having won several competitions, including the 2002 Surfing Federation National Championship in the Legends Division for men 55 and older.

Bryan Hopkins, a two-time Western SARE Research & Education Grant recipient, and **Chod Stephens**, former graduate assistant to Western SARE coordinator Phil Rasmussen and now a scientific aide at the University of Idaho in Idaho Falls, are the authors of an article on remote sensing in the March 2007 issue of *Sugar Magazine*.

Hopkins recently transferred to Brigham Young University from the University of Idaho, where he promoted the concept of sustainable potato systems (SW02-037) and assessed the sustainability of



long versus short rotations in potatoes (SW05-067).

Cameron Gillespie, a 2005 SARE Western Farmer/Rancher Grant recipient (FW05-004) and transplant from Australia, is featured in a page 10 article in the Feb. 2 issue of the *Capital Press*. Gillespie operates Gillespie Grazing LLC near Pendleton, Oregon, where he grazes sheep on wheat stubble as a weed control measure. His SARE grant was titled, "Sheep vs. Weeds: Biological Control Agents to Combat Noxious Weeds."

Bustos' family began farming the land 400 years ago when it was deeded to them by the King of Spain.

FULL BELLY RECEIVES PATRICK MADDEN AWARD

Paul Muller, a partner in Full Belly Farm located in the Capay Valley northwest of Sacramento, accepted the 2006 Patrick Madden Award for the



Western Region of SARE at the national SARE conference in Oconomowoc, Wis.

Full Belly neighbors, David and Ann Scheuring, nominated the farm for the award, presented every two years to producers emulating agricultural sustainability.

"Paul Muller is one of the most dedicated, caring individuals we know," the Scheurings said in their nomination. "He is committed to a sustainable life, from the use of natural resources to the community he lives in. His 'family' on the farm is an inspiration for others."

Phil Rasmussen, regional coordinator for the Western SARE, praised the accomplishments of Muller and his partners.

"Full Belly exemplifies each of the essential elements of what Western SARE considers as sustainable agriculture," said Rasmussen. "His integration of environmental stewardship, including alternative



Full Belly is reducing use of fossil fuels by harnessing solar energy.

energy sources, coupled with savvy marketing and resultant economic sustainability, typifies what SARE is trying to encourage and showcase. The farm is truly a model for others in the region."

Muller credited the farm's "unique amalgamation of partners," each contributing a distinctive set of skills and aptitudes.

The partners are Dru Rivers, Judith Redmond and Andrew Braitt.

"Dru is good with flowers, animals and diversified systems," said Muller. "And she's a good partner and mother to our four children – basically, she's the heart of the farm."

He described Redmond as an amazingly organized person who runs the office, tracking crops, sales and accounts as well as providing skills in entomology and skills in writing and editing.

Braitt worked as a Full Belly intern in 1992. "He was a great intern with an aptitude for farming," said Muller, "so we offered him a partnership in 1993."

Muller is especially proud of Full Belly's intern program. Of more than 100 interns, 15 or so have become full-time farmers.

"We're not regenerating our farm population very well, so we're committed to growing farmers," he said.

Two of those intern-turned-farmers are Emily Oakley, who interned at Full Belly in 2000 and 2001, and her partner, Mike Appel, who interned from 2000 through 2002. Today,

they are full time partners at Three Springs Farm just outside Tulsa, Okla., on 19 acres they purchased in December 2006, after farming 2.5 acres for three years in the Tulsa City limits.

"If we had not been interns at Full Belly Farm we would not be farming today," said Oakley. "They did a good job of exposing us to all aspects of farming." This year, Oakley and Appel will cultivate 10 acres – 5 planted to cover crops and 5 planted to more than 50 vegetable varieties, selling to farmers markets, a CSA and wholesale.

Started in 1984, Full Belly Farm today employs 40 workers and six interns operating



Paul Muller, winner of the 2006 Patrick Madden award for the Western region. –Photo by Neil Michel, Axiom

year round on 250 acres. It sells nearly 80 crops – vegetables, fruits, nuts, flowers – and animal products. Farmers markets in Marin, Berkeley and Palo Alto comprise a fourth of sales, with another quarter going to 800 members of Full Belly's CSA. The other half goes to retailers, wholesalers and 20 Bay Area restaurants, including Alice Waters' Chez Panisse.

For more information, see: www.fullbellyfarm.com.

"We're not regenerating our farm population very well, so we're committed to growing farmers," said Paul Muller of Full Belly Farm's intern program.

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Agriculture, Research,
and Education Program

...continued from page 5

New Mexico Workshop in Sustainable Agriculture, Dec. 11, Socorro, New Mexico

More than 80 people from Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona attended a sustainable agriculture workshop on improving water use efficiency, held on the campus of the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in Socorro.

"With urban encroachment into the land base and water resources for agriculture in the West, this topic was timely," said Jim Freeburn,

Western SARE Professional Development Program coordinator. "There were several good presentations about underground drip, water quality for irrigation and other options for delivering water to crops."

He added that alternative marketing techniques and enterprise diversification were also discussed. "As a result," he said, "SARE and our concepts fit like a glove for the conference."

Freeburn noted that staffers from both New Mex-

ico U.S. Senators attended, and he observed that the representative from Sen. Domenici's office took copious notes during his presentation on Western SARE and its accomplishments.

The conference is an annual event organized by Stephanie Walker, New Mexico State SARE coordinator and her assistant, Jeanine Castillo, along with John White, a New Mexico extension educator.



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