

Simply Sustainable

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from Western SARE

working to sustain western agriculture

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TANGIBLE VIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY

The Western SARE Administrative Council, during its August meeting in Portland, received a firsthand look at two timely issues – urban agriculture and sustainable marketing.

The tours and discussions were orchestrated by two former Administrative Council (AC) chairs:

- Larry Thompson is CEO of Thompson Farms, a 77-acre farm that now finds itself inside the boundaries of the new city of Damascus, located on the fringe of Portland.
- Karl Kupers is a co-founder of the Shepherd's Grain Alliance, which is achieving success marketing Pacific Northwest wheat flour as

a sustainably grown product.

"These two are on the leading edge of unfolding sustainable agriculture trends for U.S. agriculture," said Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE coordinator. "Their work is serving as models for the core fabric that will sustain our agricultural landscape for decades to come."

Rasmussen added that while the heavy lifting of administering SARE's Western Region fell to business discussions in a Portland hotel conference room, the tangible message of sustainability for Administrative Council members is found on the ground through people like Kupers and Thompson.

Thompson Farms

After a tour of Thompson's



Larry Thompson of Damascus, OR, berry and vegetable farm, Damascus Mayor Jim Wright greeted a dozen Western SARE AC members and staff

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SUSTAINABLE EXTENSION EDUCATORS

As America plies the rough waters of economic recession, county Extension educators and agents – themselves on the front lines of helping others survive – can sustain their work with this formula: learn from the past, prepare for the future and move forward with your eye on the horizon.

That formula for sustainability was presented by Dr. Philip Rasmussen in his 'capstone' address to the National Association of County Agricultural Agents attending NACAA's annual convention in Portland Sept. 20-24.



Dr. V. Philip Rasmussen.

Rasmussen, Western Region Coordinator for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, turned to his own long experience with Cooperative Extension to make his points in a speech titled, "Becoming a Sustainable Extension Educa-

tor."

While he joined the Cooperative Extension Service at Utah State University in July 1981, his work in extension actually started when, as a 16-year-old high school student, he was invited to work in USU's Agricultural Physics Lab by a USU agricultural researcher who saw Rasmussen's exhibit at a local science fair.

"Little did I realize that my work at the lab would lead to a Ph.D. in soil physics and remote sensing in 1978 at Kansas State University some 12 years later," said Rasmus-

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TOURS, CONFERENCES MAKE A SPLASH

Two recent Western SARE initiatives – subregional conferences and sustainable ag tour grants – are making a positive splash with their target audiences, according to surveys of conference and tour participants.

A survey of participants in Western SARE's five subregional conferences held over the last two years shows that those attending have shared some aspect of the conference with nearly 3,000 people so far, and, they anticipate sharing information gleaned with more than 8,400 more people in coming years.

In addition, 97% of the subregional conference participants surveyed said they gained new knowledge at the gathering, and 95% said they



Alejandro Badilles, a farm advisor on the Northern Marianas island of Rota, engages the island's youth during a recent sustainable ag tour.

have "aspirations to do more in sustainable agriculture."

Meanwhile, respondents to the sustainable agriculture tour survey expected to share some aspect of the tour with more

than 13,500 people in the year following the tours. What's more, 99% of respondents said the tours improved their awareness of topics covered and that they gained new knowledge, while 89% said they gained new skills, and 93% said what they saw on the tour modified their opinions or attitudes.

"When we look at the hundreds of people positively and directly affected by these groundbreaking activities, it's clear that our Administrative Council made wise decisions when they agreed to fund and promote them," said Western SARE Deputy Coordinator Robert Newhall who conducted the surveys. "These are cost-effective ways to reach our target audiences with information that is helping to sustain the West's agriculture."

The subregional conferences began with the Pacific subregion in October 2007 (Guam) and continued with the Southwest in June 2008 (Albuquerque), Hawaii in September 2008 (Kona), Mountain/Plains in October 2008 (Cheyenne) and Pacific Northwest in February 2009 (Spokane). Two more are scheduled, one California this December, the other in Alaska next March.

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"These are cost-effective ways to reach our target audiences with information that is helping to sustain the West's agriculture."

— Bob Newhall,
Deputy Coordinator for Western
SARE

AC Group Expands SARE's Vision

The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program has played a key role helping assimilate into mainstream agriculture concepts like organic farming, rotational grazing, cover crops, farmers markets and CSAs.

Now it's time for SARE to build on its "historical strength of grassroots connections and regional structure" to expand its vision in a way that provides consumers and producers with a more complete understanding of the complexity and value of agriculture in its broadest sense.

This vision expansion was the consensus of the Executive Committees of SARE's four regional Administrative Councils, who met earlier this year to envision the future of this 21-year-old USDA-CSREES program.

"SARE is in a unique position within USDA to capitalize on public attitudes and perceptions regarding sustainable agriculture," the group said in its consensus statement. "Relations with Congress, the Administration and the Secretary and Undersecretary of Agriculture should be cultivated and strengthened."

The executive committees, made up of the chair, chair-elect and past chair of each of the regional governing bodies, defined five areas as being crucial for achieving sustainable food systems:

1. Watershed focus
2. Systems approaches
3. Agricultural of the middle value chains
4. Expansion of the farmer/rancher component of SARE
5. Refocus on quality of life efforts to more fully embrace social and economic issues.

"This vision acknowledges that practices differ across regions but lead to a common goal of using finite resources in the most efficient and ethical manner possible for humankind," said the Regional Executive Committee Consensus Statement.

KEY ISSUES FACE WESTERN SARE

The Western SARE Program continues to make substantial progress toward our goal of bringing sustainable agriculture to our key audiences as well to the whole of American agriculture.

More than ever, we are seeing that our activities to effect innovative research and to educate agricultural producers and professionals have become a coordinated effort to sustain agriculture as well as to enhance agricultural sustainability.

The past six months have brought a number of significant opportunities for the SARE program, and I would like to share with you some of the key issues our Western SARE staff and Administrative Council have been addressing.

Budgetary Crises – There is no way to overstate the simultaneous budgetary crises in state and local governments and educational institutions across the West. In many ways, although it has been delayed, the states and island protectorates are now reeling from the effects of the national and international economic downturn. In addition, our agricultural clientele, namely farmers and ranchers, are figuratively swimming through the seas of an economic tsunami.

Western SARE is making every effort to ensure that our research-based solutions and cost-saving agricultural systems are being delivered to the end user. Quite literally, Western SARE is working to sustain agriculture.

Subregional Conferences – Western SARE has continued with the evaluation of recommendations from farmers, ranchers and agricultural professionals who attended one of five subregional conferences (Guam, Albuquerque, Hawaii, Cheyenne and Spokane). We are currently working to register attendees for



**Western SARE
Coordinator's Column**
Dr. V. Philip Rasmussen

our capstone California Subregional Conference, Dec. 2-3 in Visalia.

As the measurable outcomes from these conferences are tabulated, we are posting them on our Western SARE website under the tab, 'conferences.' The conferences have proved to be absolutely and unequivocally essential to the goals and mission of the Western SARE program. We are deeply indebted to all who have helped us in this informative and useful effort.

National SARE Content Management System (CMS) – SARE continues to improve and increase our electronic presence across the worldwide web. It is obvious from results of our subregional conferences that our upcoming generation of farmers and ranchers is using the web as its resource for new information.

Our National SARE Outreach Office is leading an effort to provide improved web services for the regions and nationally. Our AC Executive Committee has authorized full participation by Western SARE staff for this ongoing effort to upgrade and standardize the national and re-

gional SARE websites, while filling them with more targeted and useful information.

Urban Sustainability – I was able to attend the Roots of Change (nonprofit) Urban Sustainable Marketing Conference in Oakland on July 7-9. This informative and useful conference included reports from several SARE-initiated projects across the Western region. Linkages like this with other entities exploring sustainability are of ever-increasing importance to the SARE program.

Western SARE's Administrative Council and staff helped organize a special seminar on urban agriculture and agricultural land preservation that highlighted the efforts of Thompson Farms, aided by the new city of Damascus on the fringes of the Portland metro area. Three state legislators, the mayor of Damascus and several council members attended the meeting along with the Western SARE Administrative Council and staff.

WAAESD, WED, & Western Deans of Agriculture – Western SARE continues to participate in meetings of the Western Deans and Directors of Extension (WED) and Directors of Ag Experiment Station (WAAESD), such as their annual summer meeting in Semiahmoo, Washington, July 20-23, 2009. The continued interaction of the Western SARE program with the Directors of Experiment Stations and the Directors of Extension is crucial to sustaining agriculture across the West.

We hope this provides you some perspective about our efforts to help to sustain our colleagues in agricultural production and the many agriculture support agencies that serve them. I invite you to contact us with your questions, suggestions or observations, 435.797.2257 or wsare@usu.edu.

Western SARE is making every effort to ensure that our research-based solutions and cost-saving agricultural systems are being delivered to the end user.

— *Phil Rasmussen,*
Coordinator, Western SARE



“We have some connections to farms but we need more. We need to engage farmers, but it’s huge challenge fitting this into the community.”

— *Anita Yap,*
Damascus City
Planner



Carlotta Collette



Rod Park



Anita Yap



Elizabeth Weigand



James Wright

TANGIBLE VIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY

from page 1

for a land-preservation discussion at the Damascus city office.

“Damascus has a dream of becoming an extraordinary place. We want to create a new model for what I think is a broken model,” he said, referring to urban sprawl gobbling up prime farmland. “Farming creates jobs and saves land,” Wright added. “Folks in Damascus want to maintain the rural atmosphere. If we can use farming to keep it rural, we can make it work.”

Damascus, which became a new city on Portland’s urban fringe in 2004, now has 10,000 residents and is expected to reach 60,000 in another 20 years. Thompson, whose third-generation farm was absorbed inside the city’s boundary, has been working closely with Anita Yap, Damascus city planner and Elizabeth Weigand, a graduate student in landscape architecture at the University of Oregon who is part of a team of students using Thompson Farm in a study of sustainable development and agricultural preservation (see <http://ci.damascus.or.us/references/misc/UOprojThompFarm.pdf>.)

Yap noted a strong community interest in local food, farms, CSAs and community gardens.

“We have some connections to farms but we need more,” she said. “We need to engage farmers, but it’s huge challenge fitting this into the community.”

One challenge is the Ore-

gon land-use law implemented in 1977 that essentially sharpens the boundary between urban use and farm and forest use. Damascus, working with Thompson, would like to blur that boundary.

“It’s an economic opportunity, but also a challenge to integrate farming into the community,” said Yap.

Weigand said that because of the established urban



Larry Thompson and his son, Matt.

growth boundary, ag use has long been separated from urban use. Her project seeks to deal with practical integration between urban dwellers and agriculture and the tensions that can arise.

In her presentation, Weigand described how thoughtful integration of spaces can work to the advantage of residents and farmers alike. In this so-called “Trans-Farmation,” in addition to varying densities of housing on some percentage of farmland, Thompson’s remaining urban agriculture could include annual and perennial crops, greenhouses and community gardens. Commercial venues might include a farmers market and on-farm restaurant featuring farm output. Community amenities could include the restored barn

that exists on Thompson’s farm (a community landmark), a nature and farm trail systems, a community preservation kitchen and a restored wetland.

Carlotta Collette, a member of the Portland Metro Council, a seven-member elected body that works with officials in 25 cities and three counties in the Portland Metropolitan Area, liked the idea of creating urban-rural communities.

“This is a great model. I really admire your city,” said Collette. “If you cannot use a community like this as a model, we’re really in trouble.”

Another Metro Council member Rod Park, a farmer whose interest lies in conversion of farmland to urban use, offered a note of caution.

“Having a customer base is one of the key issues that must be addressed,” said Park. “How do you make this model work when the farmer might feed only 1% of the area’s population?”

Thompson, likewise, offers an important note of caution: “You’ve got to make it economical. Not just sustainable, but thriving. You can’t legislate the saving of farmland. You need to make it a strong business entity.”

Shepherd’s Grain

To help them understand the how promoting sustainable production can add value to a product, the Western SARE Administrative Council members visited Grand Central Bakery, an end user of Shepherd’s Grain.

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TANGIBLE VIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Fifteen-year-old Grand Central Bakery realized seven or eight years ago that, to be a successful artisan baker, it needed to think about its main ingredient – wheat flour.

Grand Central co-founder Ben Davis said that led him to conversations with Karl Kupers and Fred Fleming, who had created the Shepherd's Grain Alliance of producers, currently 33 in Idaho, Washington and Oregon, who use sustainable practices to grow their wheat.

The Shepherd's Grain story evolved from Kupers' determination in 1985 to sustain the farm he operated without subsidies. That led to diversification, no-till (now called direct seeding) and a Farmer/Rancher Grant from Western SARE in 1996 that helped him confirm that his practices were on the right track.

Realizing that marketing was the missing link from the equation, he joined Fred Fleming, a wheat producer, and several other producers to form the Shepherd's Grain Alliance.

The core strategy, said Kupers, was to reconnect the farm and consumer. Shepherd's Grain takes pride in being able to provide the consumer with information of where their food comes from and how it is produced. They have created a sustainable relationship between the grower, baker and customer for the benefit of all.

Kupers said the alliance is succeeding at obtaining market opportunities because it has interspersed the values of "story" and "quality" into the "price."

The idea of "story" has resonated with Grand Central's Davis, who said, "We're trying to learn how to tell our story to employees and to the customer base."

Grand Central's Sawtooth



Karl Kupers, left, and Ben Davis at Grand Central Baking's Sawtooth bakery and retail shop in Portland and, below, Shepherd's Grain being put to good use.



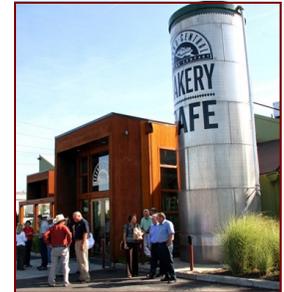
Bakery, which serves as both a retail outlet and the company's main bakery, provides customers with an open view of the baking operation, part of telling the story about its product.

Today, Grand Central has 155 employees with six locations in Portland and two in Seattle. It's a size bigger than Davis ever imagined, but it has been a slow, natural growth.

"In general, we're trying to use quality ingredients and artisan skills and slowing everything down to get a better product than others are creating," he said. "We're a little slow but we make better decisions that way."

Another end user of Shepherd's Grain is Delphina's Bakery, owned by Carolyn Mistell, who visited the Western SARE AC members during their deliberations in Portland.

Mistell met Kupers in 2004,



"Our customers buy our bread because they trust us. They trust us to be putting good ingredients like Shepherd's Grain into our bread."
— Carolyn Mistell, owner of Delphina's Bakery in Portland



Delphina's Carolyn Mistell

SUSTAINABLE AG EDUCATOR

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sen noting his continuing affinity for Extension.

"There is simply no other group where I feel that I am among truly 'unselfish colleagues,'" he said, "because common dedication to sustaining agriculture forms an irreversible bond between us."

As a guide to quickly 'Learn from the Past,' Rasmussen challenged his Extension colleagues to "Find a Grandpa."

He'd learned that lesson when, as a graduate student in Kansas, his young family was devastated when their lush garden of lettuce and radishes suddenly vanished. New to the region (he'd even brought his irrigation equipment, much to the amusement of his fellow graduate students who informed him that 38 inches of annual rainfall was sufficient), he called his father, a retired farmer, for advice. He said, "Find a grandpa."

"I soon learned that in any community, there is someone with some grey hair and years of experience living under those conditions who could offer advice regarding the normal garden pests and any other problems, of the area – a surrogate grandpa," Rasmussen recalled. He found Dr. Ed Skidmore of the USDA Wind Erosion Lab, who had sage advice not only about gardening but about assembling one's graduate committee.

To illustrate the second part of his sustainability equation, "Prepare for the Future," Rasmussen cited the experience of PT-109 commander John Kennedy. His and his colleagues' memoirs note that crew members bouncing along waves and rough seas at breakneck speeds would fall down on deck unless they learned to stand with their knees bent.

"Clearly, the successful Extension educators of the next decade will be the ones that can keep their knees bent and learn to move with the trends

and capitalize on the opportunities that the waves of change will undoubtedly bring," Rasmussen told his audience.

As an example of how we can benefit by being prepared to set aside our best laid plans (keep our knees bent) when a new wave of opportunity presents itself, Rasmussen recalled an event at the end of a particularly fatiguing day as an academic department head. The phone rang at 5:30, and Rasmussen had to decide whether to take another call or head for a nice dinner at home.

He answered, and the voice on the other end said, "My name is Dale Young, and you need to talk to me. I'll be there in 10 minutes." Rasmussen stayed to host his unannounced guest. He later learned that Young, developer of Sencor, Carbyne, Sineb and Mirex for agriculture, was donating \$100,000 to ag education efforts at Utah State, and his wife, Adele, later gave another \$200,000 for a teaching greenhouse.

"Keeping the knees bent and staying at the office was certainly worth it on that day," he said.

To hammer home the third element of the Rasmussen equation, "Move Forward with Your Eye Always on the Horizon," he cited some eclectic philosophies from peers and mentors he's encountered along his extension and sustainable agricultural paths.

From Wilbur Weurtz, an Arizona cotton grower and member of the first Western SARE Administrative Council (AC): "Grant money is like manure – it works best when it is spread around, which includes," Rasmussen added, "spreading it generously to your peers who can join with you in reaching your joint horizons (goals)."

Larry Thompson, Damascus, Oregon, berry and vegetable grower and former AC chair: "Agriculture can be sustained in an urban environment, but one must be able to think outside the box." Rasmussen said Thompson is finding ways to allow metropolitan growth while retaining base acres for open agricultural vistas on his farm, especially the vista from a *sustainable vantage*.

Karl Kupers, former Washington farmer, co-founder of Shepherd's Grain Alliance and immedi-

ate past AC chair: "Truly *sustainable* marketing can be the means to ensure a fair return to farmers and ranchers." Kupers adds that the *sustainable elements of a farming system* can be quantified – people are beginning to realize there is value in "sustainably grown."

Jill Auburn, former national director of SARE: "It is always better to be at the table than on the menu." Rasmussen added, "Jill has built a strong national SARE program by always seeking collaborative relationships rather than competitive squabbles. We would be wise to emulate her example as truly *sustainable agents*."

Dennis Teranishi, CEO of Hawaiian Host and former AC member: "Always under-promise and over-deliver." Rasmussen said Teranishi always set a powerful example to other AC members by cheerfully but carefully accepting assignments he could accomplish in a stated timeline, then bringing back to the table more accomplishments than assigned. "A *sustainable agent* would do well to follow his example."

Larry Cundall, Wyoming rancher, chair of the Glendo Wind Energy Association and new Western SARE AC member: "Extension professors must publish or perish in the university environment. But they darn well better pay attention to the needs of local farmers and ranchers or they will not have a base of operations from which to publish."

Rasmussen summed up his philosophical equation for sustainably navigating rough economic waters by citing the experience of Larry K. Yee, a friend, personal hero and retired county Extension director in Ventura County, California. Yee helped establish a local nonprofit Sustainable Agriculture Foundation called the Hansen Trust.

"The foundation was so successful," said Rasmussen, "that upon Yee's recent retirement from Extension, he now works with the same foundation, pursuing his dreams of sustainable systems."



"Little did I realize that my work at the lab (above) would lead to a Ph.D. in soil physics and remote sensing in 1978 at Kansas State University some 12 years later."

— *Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE Coordinator*

ENGAGING PRODUCERS IN R&E

In each year's announcement of Western SARE Research & Education grants, the language clearly states that funded projects must engage producers in all phases, from start to finish.

Dan Sullivan and Alexandra Stone of Oregon State University took that message to heart with a two-pronged approach in executing their 2005 grant, Integrated Soil and Crop Management for Organic Potato Production (SW05-091).

Not only did their project establish nutrient, late blight and insect pest management strategies, it engaged 24 farmers in decision-making from initiation to completion of the project. In addition to helping guide the researchers and extension personnel involved, the farmers contributed information about how they grew potatoes, from varieties, to hilling to enterprise budgets.

During the first winter meetings, the project team collaboratively identified and prioritized things that reduce the sustainability of potato production. They identified and discussed known solutions and generated hypotheses to be tested during the first season during on-farm trials. Then they selected who would participate in the trials and developed the annual budget.

Sullivan, an associate professor whose work involves managing nutrients from organic sources, led the research elements of the project.

The nutrient management trials found that mineralization of nitrogen from soil organic matter supplied most the N needed by the organic potato crop. This meant most of the farmers could reduce expensive N inputs. From this information, the project team was able to develop planning



Producer cooperators learn about field scouting for disease and insect problems during the Western SARE R&E grant on organic potato management.

A Western SARE Grant Profile



values for crop N budgets in organic systems.

For late blight management, farmers were taught to diagnose the disease in the field and learned the value and use of copper fungicides for late blight control. In addition, three commercially available potato cultivars with late blight resistance were identified and adopted by participating farmers.

The tuber flea beetle was identified and confirmed as the most important insect pest in western Oregon and Washington, and monitoring protocols and tuber damage assessment methods were developed and published in an extension publication.

Stone, an associate professor in the OSU Department of Horticulture, reported on producer engagement. She

noted that an end-of-project survey showed that, compared with other OSU research projects in which the farmers had been involved, this one was better planned, broader in scope and more in depth. Further, the farmers said there was more collaboration and that they gained more knowledge.

Indeed, every one of the farmer collaborators said they would conduct an on-farm experiment with assistance from OSU and would encourage other growers to participate as well. All said that interacting with both farmers and researchers helped them better understand their farm, and they all agreed that science-based information is essential to improving organic systems.

Asked what they learned from the project, the producers cited 13 positive changes, including the ability to diagnose problems like late blight, flea beetles and wireworm damage in the field and practices they can adopt to overcome those problems.

The farmers responded overwhelmingly that the most valuable aspects of the project were building relationships with other growers and researchers and the broad, multidisciplinary approach and detail on a single crop.

For more information, go to the project's website, www.ospod.org.

Not only did this Research and Education Grant project on organic potatoes establish nutrient, late blight and insect pest management strategies, it engaged 24 farmers in decision-making from initiation to completion of the project.

POSITIVE IMPACTS FROM PDP GRANTS

Since 1994, Professional Development Program (PDP) grants funded by Western SARE have been creating widespread positive impacts on diverse audiences, including producers, educators, researchers and extension.

When producers are involved in these competitive grant projects, performance is even further strengthened.

Those are among the findings of a survey conducted last year of grant recipients and individuals trained through PDP competitive grants, which are designed to carry out “train-the-trainer” projects in sustaining agriculture for Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service and other ag-support groups.

Assistant PDP training coordinator Al Kurki, who worked with Washington State University’s Social and Economic Sciences Research Center to conduct the survey, said the finding about the value of producer involvement was a bonus.

“The correlation of project PI survey data provided the whole SARE program with its first glimpse at the relationship between project performance and producer involvement in SARE-funded projects – a SARE hallmark,” Kurki said.

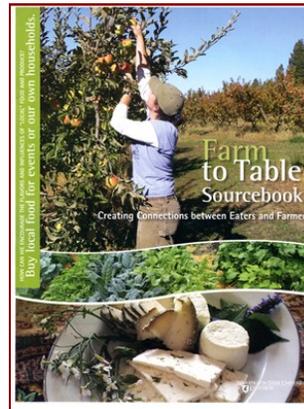
Over the past 15 years, Western SARE has funded 80 PDP grants. Fifty were selected for the two-phase survey, part of a systematic effort to assess the reach and impact of all Western SARE grant programs. The survey netted responses from 32 principal investigators (PIs) involved in 40 projects, an 80% return rate.

Here are key findings:

The PIs responding reported that 218 events – half of them workshops – were conducted through 40 projects. Not all PIs were able to provide numbers of participants, but it is estimated that

across key audiences, 10,395 people attended 202 PDP-sponsored events. Extension personnel participated in 82% of events, NRCS field staff in 64%, other ag professionals in 80% and farmers and ranchers participated in 81% of the events.

Of the 182 educational products created from the 40 SARE-funded projects, 19% were newsletters, 15% were extension bulletins and 14%



Educational products from Western SARE PDP projects.

were manuals. Materials used for reference, such as websites, CD-ROM, fact sheets and pocket guides – represent 23% of the products. Fourteen percent of products created are educational, including videos, posters, PowerPoint presentations and demonstrations.

Of the products created, 67% were distributed to extension personnel, 62% to NRCS personnel, 88% to other ag professionals and 63% to farmers and ranchers.

Outcomes from these events and products include increased

access to sustainable agriculture materials and resources among key groups, promoting a broader and deeper understanding of sustainable agriculture. Some PIs reported greater recognition for sustainable agriculture activities and programs, and one reported changes in policies that are more favorable toward sustainable agriculture.

Forty percent cited unanticipated outcomes, mostly positive ones, including:

- Project efforts and activities were extended or expanded, including spinoff programs
- Collaborations exceeded expectations
- The project was more successful than expected
- Project information was used more extensively than expected

Another finding showed that a quarter of the PDP projects were built on the results of previously funded SARE grants.

In gauging the grant process and its administration, 81% of PIs gave “good” to “excellent” ratings in all but two of 18 aspects – 71% gave those ratings on “timeliness of distributing funds for awarded projects” and 68% gave those ratings to “streamlined reporting requirements that eliminate redundancy.”

When it comes to service, 91% of PIs said they are “very satisfied” with Western SARE programs and services, with 62% saying the program and services “somewhat exceeded expectations” and 19% saying “greatly exceeds expectations.”

Suggestions for improvement included:

- increase grant periods
- reduce reporting complexity
- increase opportunities for networking and information sharing

“The correlation of project PI survey data provided the whole SARE program with its first glimpse at the relationship between project performance and producer involvement in SARE-funded projects – a SARE hallmark.”

— Al Kurki,
Assistant Training
Coordinator for PDP

A 'High-Performing' SARE State Coordinator

Shortly after joining the Department of Extension Plant Sciences at New Mexico State University, Stephanie Walker wondered whether a summons to the department head's office meant she was in trouble.

The visit was an eye-opener.

"I have to confess, although I'd heard of SARE, I didn't know what it was all about when they asked me to take over as SARE PDP Coordinator for the state," recalled Walker. "That began my serious indoctrination into the wonderful world of sustainable agriculture. It's been an exciting ride ever since."

Her impressions after five years are that while much of the ongoing agricultural research has been geared to "bigger, faster, more profitable," often without consideration for long-term consequences, "SARE has been on the forefront of pursuing research that not only will result in profitable ag business but will do so in a manner that benefits future generations of this planet."

Jim Freeburn, Regional Training Coordinator for Western SARE, described Walker as a high performing state coordinator.

"She has numerous sustainable ag activities going on simultaneously, including research, promotion and educational conferences on sustainability," Freeburn said. "Stephanie is a genuinely nice person who does great work on behalf of SARE and the people of New Mexico."

Walker said that serving as Professional Development Coordinator has broadened perspectives on her own research in vegetable production. A key component of Walker's job as Extension Vegetable Specialist is working with larger producers, and she said her SARE experience has allowed her to introduce



Stephanie Walker

SARE State Coordinator Profile

to these operators concepts and techniques trialed through SARE projects.

Walker's main areas of work are extension and research. For extension, she coordinates field days, grower meetings and conferences highlighting chile peppers and onions, providing outreach to growers and serving as liaison between researchers, producers and the vegetable industry. Her research involves breeding high-color paprika varieties and chiles for mechanical harvest. She's also collaborating with multidisciplinary research teams investigating issues related to chile yields and working toward a more mechanized growth and production system.

For her work in sustainable agriculture, Walker began coordinating a yearly workshop to train extension agents and other ag professionals in key areas of sustaining agriculture.

"I was thrilled," she said, "when an agent approached me about hosting training in his county. Since then we've moved the training around the state, allowing us to expand collaboration and face-to-face training to clientele." She was fortunate to work in

cooperation with Jeanine Castillo, who coordinated the past three workshops. In large part because of her excellent work in sustainable ag, Castillo was recently hired as the coordinator for the newly formed Small Farms Institute at NMSU.

Walker said the workshop and Western SARE's Southwest subregional planning conference in Albuquerque in June 2008 have increased knowledge of and participation in SARE programs. One result has been an increase in proposals submitted and funded in New Mexico.

"The country seems to be waking up to the critical importance of sustainability for agricultural operations," Walker said. "Public policy that supports these practices will be critical. Educating the public and introducing children to these concepts early in their formative years will also be key."

Walker is currently planning the fifth annual sustainable ag workshop Dec. 8, this year in Socorro in cooperation with county Extension agent Tom Dean. Topics for the daylong workshop range from water forecasts for agriculture to improving soil health to producing and marketing grass-fed beef.

Walker, who earned bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees from New Mexico State, worked as a research specialist in the NMSU Agronomy and Horticultural Department before her appointment as Vegetable Specialist in the Department of Extension Plant Sciences.

She enjoys snow skiing and pursuing hobbies that keep her close to home, including landscaping for curb appeal and easy maintenance and vegetable breeding, specifically blue corn and tomatoes.

"I get my fill of chile at work," she said.



Western SARE has a state SARE Coordinator in every state and Pacific island protectorate with a land-grant institution in the Western Region. This issue, we highlight the work of Stephanie Walker of New Mexico

FOSTERING ‘CROSS-POLLINATION’

Every summer, since 1996, Western SARE state Professional Development Program (PDP) coordinators have met at different locations to share and learn from one another and about new facets of the SARE program.

This year’s meeting in Cheyenne drew five visitors – state coordinators from the North Central and Southern SARE regions – fostering markedly different results.

“To me, the most important outcome of our summer PDP meeting was the synergy that arose from the interaction of the three SARE regions present,” said Jim Freeburn Western SARE PDP coordinator. The West has 17 coordinators from 13 states and four island protectorates, each appointed by their respective directors of Cooperative Extension.

“There was so much positive energy between the state coordinators from the various regions that it was extremely rewarding for me as a planner,” Freeburn added.

Debi Kelly, SARE state coordinator from Missouri in the North Central Region, agreed, saying she appreciated the agricultural tours and learning how other coordinators used their training funds. Kelly was especially intrigued by one Western SARE activity.

“The one thing I found of true interest is the stakeholder conferences,” said Kelly. “In working with NC SARE as we look to the future, I wonder if something similar could help us determine our future.”

Cinda Williams, SARE state coordinator in Idaho, said it was great to have people from more than one region together. Williams cited value in hearing how coordinators from other regions report, spend their funds and have



Kent Hunter describes his family’s ranching operation during the Professional Development Program tour last summer in Cheyenne.

different organizational aspects.

“Not necessarily that they do things better – it is sort of a reality check so see how we compare,” she said. “In some things, maybe our way is better, in others maybe we could benefit by tweaking.”

Allan Sabaldica, SARE coordinator in the Northern Mariana Islands, said the meeting benefited all the regions represented.

“The cross-pollination did a good job helping us to understand the program,” said Sabaldica. “It gave us a wealth of information and showed us where we have room for improvement. It’s a good way to act as a team on the diversity of challenges we face.”

Freeburn observed that long-term connections were established that will provide benefits for years to come.

Williams agreed.

“Getting to know Debi Kelly was good for me,” she said. “There could definitely be some future collaboration or sharing of information between us.”

As is traditional during the summer PDP meeting, participants got a close-up look at

local agriculture through farm tours.

“The tours were a big hit,” said Freeburn. “The diversity in Wyoming’s agriculture surprised nearly all of the tour participants, and the evaluation results showed the tours to be a major success and highlight.”

Coordinator Kelly from Missouri found it incredible that takes 5 acres for one cow for a month.

“I wish I had walked across the field to see the grass up close to fully comprehend that,” she said.

In addition to a tour of the University of Wyoming Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Center at Lingle, PDP coordinators visited three operations in southeast Wyoming, gleaned a flavor of efforts to sustain agriculture in the Cowboy State:

- Spear 7 Farms just west of Lingle
- Hunter Ranch 20 miles southwest of Torrington
- Ridenour Ranch near Yoder

The SARE PDP coordinators learned that Tim and Crista

“The one thing I found of true interest is the stakeholder conferences. In working with NC SARE as we look to the future, I wonder if something similar could help us determine our future.”

— Debi Kelly,
Missouri SARE
Coordinator



The hoophouse and vegetable crops at Ridenour Ranch, where Mike and Cindy Ridenour raise vegetables and grass-fed organic beef, selling the products through farmers markets and community supported agriculture venues.

— Bob Newhall Photos

‘CROSS-POLLINATION’ IN WYOMING

From previous page

Bartel of 7 Spear Farm moved their dairy cows in November 2001 from Manawa, Wisconsin, to Goshen County, Wyoming, where they began the transition to organic production. On May 1, 2008, their switch completed, the Bartels began marketing organic milk, shipping it through Organic Valley for processing in Colorado Springs.

Tim Bartel, a cancer survivor, said the primary motivation for switching to organic was the health of himself and his family. A lifetime of applying pesticides raised concerns over their potential carcinogen effects. Organic production, he said, is also more profitable and allows him to spend more time with his family.

The Bartels run 248 dairy cows and 78 beef cows, farming 510 irrigated acres – 430 certified organic and 80 in transition – and managing 5,000 acres of leased pasture.

The dairy is computerized, allowing ear tags to be ‘read’ daily recording things like production, temperature and conductivity. Currently, about a third of the dairy cows graze on pasture, and more acres are being converted so all can graze.

Not only is Bartel trying to “shift the way I think” to spend more time with his family, he’s thinking about



A calf at Spear 7 Farms.

how to be more efficient. For example, he has kept his dairy herd just the right size to fill a tanker, making freight costs more efficient.

In 1988, Kent and Lynette Hunter assumed management of Hunter Ranch from Kent’s father, who had homesteaded in 1908 and purchased the land in 1934 for 50 cents to \$1 an acre. Today, Kent ranches with two brothers, Joe and Casey, who runs a separate herd.

On 8,000 acres, Joe and Kent run 200 cows, the herd reduced by drought, which has the positive effect of an intensive culling program to keep the most productive, well adapted cows. The cattle are marketed as natural beef, with no vaccinations or pesticides used on the cattle and no herbicides used on the ranch. Weeds are mowed and chopped, and Kent uses no fly control: the cows and flies evolved together for centuries, he said, so the cattle should be able to handle the flies.

At the Ridenour Ranch, where Mike and Cindy

Ridenour, both educated as chemists, had begun farming in the late 1990s, the coordinators heard how the Ridenours realized they needed to “shift the paradigm” to become profitable. They inventoried their resources and launched on a different path, focusing on selling fresh produce at farmers markets, selling through a CSA and selling grass-fed organic beef.

While not certified organic, the Ridenours produce organically, and they emphasize that a key to their success is face-to-face direct marketing. They sell to farmers markets in Cheyenne, Fort Collins and, on occasion, Laramie. Their CSA has 14 members (see www.meadowmaidfoods.com).

They run around 85 Hereford and black baldies, marketing 40-45 grass-fed steers a year.

Freeburn summarized his view of the summer PDP meeting:

“The ongoing interaction between and among our state coordinators never ceases to amaze me. The Western Region is so large and diverse that the people always learn from one another and the collaboration that results continues year round. It’s rewarding to see people from different regions and climatic zones share with one another and plan programs that utilize information they have garnered at these meetings.”

“The ongoing interaction between and among our state coordinators never ceases to amaze me. The Western Region is so large and diverse that the people always learn from one another and the collaboration that results continues year round.”

— Jim Freeburn,
Western SARE PDP
Coordinator



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TOURS, CONFERENCES MAKE A SPLASH

from page 1

Attended so far by more than 500 invited key stakeholders, the conferences are designed to elicit discussion about critical needs and issues facing each area of SARE's widely diverse Western region. Asked how the conference or information it provided helped them:

- 78% of producers increased networking with other producers
- 62% adopted one or more of the practices shown
- 55% increased their operation's diversification
- 43% reduced purchased off-farm inputs
- 43% improved some financial aspect of their operation
- 48% incorporated value-added
- 66% improved their environment



Jonda Crosby of Aero conducted a sustainable ag tour in Montana that included a visit to the farm of Bob Quinn.

- 66% improved their quality of life
- 78% plan to adopt one or more of the practices shown
- 76% will increase diversity
- 58% will reduce off-farm inputs
- 86% will increase networking with other producers
- 76% will incorporate value-added

The Sustainable Agricultural Tour Grants were begun in 2008, with applicants eligible for up to \$2,000 to conduct a tour or field day focused on ag sustainability. So far, Western SARE has funded 14 tours attended by 480 participants, mostly producers, in nine states and two Pacific Island protectorates.

Participants were asked whether they will use some aspect of the tour in the next year:

The Western SARE Administrative Council has voted to continue funding ag tour grants.