

• REACH OUT •  
LISTEN • RESPOND



Western Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education  
**SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE**



WESTERN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

# Reach Out—Listen—Respond

Western Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education  
Subregional Conference Experience



September 2011

Special Edition, Simply Sustainable

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### Western SARE Program

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

### Western SARE PDP

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

### SARE

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## A SUBREGIONAL JOURNEY

In a 30-month span, from October 2007 to March 2010, nearly 700 westerners with a stake in production agriculture – farmers, ranchers, educators, agency personnel, NGO leaders, and more – voiced more than 7,000 individual comments about the state of western agriculture and how it can be strengthened and sustained.

Their comments, often impassioned, always heartfelt, were not made in the vacuum of random rhetoric. Rather, they flowed from seven subregional listening sessions orchestrated by the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, or Western SARE.

The motivation for drawing ag folks to the SARE table was twofold:

- Identify and prioritize emerging and unmet research and education needs in sustainable food, fiber and energy systems.
- Increase stakeholder and policymaker awareness of the accomplishments of Western SARE and its grant projects.

“One of SARE’s strengths has been its commitment to involve farmers, ranchers and a broad cross-section of other stakeholders in the program’s design and delivery,” reads the charge for developing the conferences. “Western SARE turns once again to its customers to reflect on its past and shape its future.”

As usual, SARE’s customers – the conferences’ invited guests – came through.



Moderator Jerry DeWitt

Guided by “Six Burning Questions” in facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions, attendees offered ideas that ran the gamut – from model farms to alternative crops, from water conservation to infrastructure enhancement, from renewable energy to systems research, from underserved producers to youth education, the list goes on.

Gauged by this avalanche of information and virtually every other measure, the

### What’s inside...

...a look at how Western SARE gave voice to 700 constituents region-wide at seven listening sessions, and how the ideas expressed are helping to guide Western SARE in the months and years ahead. We welcome your comments and questions, [wsare@usu.edu](mailto:wsare@usu.edu) 435.797.2257.

### In brief...

- 7 Conferences
- 700+ attendees
- 30 local speakers
- 100 hours of facilitated listening sessions
- 7,000+ recorded comments
- 140 posters on SARE grants
- Go to: [www.westernsare.org/Conferences/Subregional-Stakeholder-Conferences](http://www.westernsare.org/Conferences/Subregional-Stakeholder-Conferences) for priorities, posters, presentations and more

conferences met or exceeded the expectations of the Western SARE Administrative Council and staff. Feedback shows most conference participants were edified with new, broader perspectives on SARE and sustainability. And most said they immensely appreciated the sincerity with which their ideas were heard and recorded.

The larger question then becomes, have the conferences met the expectations of the participants themselves and thousands of others in western agriculture for which they served as proxies? Will SARE respond to, and act upon, what it heard?

In March 2011, Jerry DeWitt, a long-time advocate of agricultural sustainability, and who moderated all seven

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## A SUBREGIONAL JOURNEY

from page 1

conferences, led a strategic planning discussion among the Western SARE Administrative Council and staff. His setup began with these questions:

- How do we ensure that the ideas generated from the conferences will not sit on the shelf?
- How will we keep stakeholders informed and involved?
- How will we measure impacts?
- Should we measure the difference it makes?

To fathom the collected wealth of information, the SARE staff had sorted, collated and evaluated the thousands of recorded responses from listening sessions and conference surveys. Administrative Council members, most of whom had attended one or more of the conferences themselves, then analyzed and discussed the information as an underpinning of their strategic planning.

This intense winnowing process yielded a premium harvest: critical issues on which the Administrative Council and staff are focused on now, and several more to address over the longer view. What's more, the AC and staff have already harnessed many of the ideas brought forth by

conference participants.

(Details of Western SARE's response begin on page 3.)

"This has been an inspiring process," said Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE regional coordinator. "The Administrative Council truly cares about sustaining agriculture in the West. Their combined knowledge and wisdom is immense. I have the utmost confidence that the future of Western SARE is in good hands."



*"This has been an inspiring process. The Administrative Council truly cares about sustaining agriculture in the West. Their combined knowledge and wisdom is immense. I have the utmost confidence that the future of Western SARE is in good hands."*

— Phil Rasmussen,  
Western SARE regional coordinator



Recorder Stephanie Walker of New Mexico listens to comments at the Southwest Conference.

### The Six Burning Questions

1. What will be needed to create stronger local and regional food systems that are less reliant on imports from elsewhere?
2. What are the local and regional consumption and production trends in your local area?
3. The SARE program was commissioned, by Congress, to get its research results to the farmer and rancher. How can this process be improved?
4. What type of research, education and development projects will be necessary over the next 10 years to help economically sustain farming and the environment?
5. If Western SARE received (from Congress) an additional \$1 million per region, what types of projects should be targeted or emphasized?
6. How can we (Western SARE) overcome barriers that may prevent underserved groups, including socially disadvantaged groups, from applying for and receiving SARE funding.

### Subregional Conference Schedule

- **Pacific** Subregional Conference, October 2007, Tumon Bay, Guam
- **Southwest** Subregional Conference, June 2008, Albuquerque
- **Hawaii** Subregional Conference, September 2008, Kailua-Kona
- **Mountain and High Plains** Subregional Conference, October 2008, Cheyenne
- **Pacific Northwest** Subregional Conference, February 2009, Spokane
- **California** Subregional Conference, December 2009, Visalia
- **Alaska** Subregional Conference, March 2010, Fairbanks.

## WESTERN AC TAKES ACTION

“We had more than 700 people who considered this important enough to tell us what they thought. We need to honor that, to make sure our investment pays off and we have meaningful change on the ground.”

That charge, from sustainable agriculture advocate Jerry DeWitt, was delivered to Western SARE Administrative Council members as they mulled responses to thousands of comments captured in the Western SARE subregional conferences. The conferences, simple in concept yet massive in scope, have yielded substantive actions and impacts. As a direct result of the conferences:

- Stakeholder input has set the agenda for several immediate and long-range actions by Western SARE.
- Grants, up to \$50,000 each, were issued in each of the seven subregions in direct response to stated conference priorities.
- Western SARE granting documents and outreach efforts have been updated to reflect stakeholder input as well as to emphasize whole-farm systems research.
- The funding for a communications specialist was doubled to full time.
- The Western SARE Administrative Council and staff have grasped a more intimate knowledge of agriculture in all corners of the Western SARE landscape.
- More people now understand and use concepts of sustainable agriculture.
- Networking relationships among stakeholders have been created and enhanced.
- The conferences themselves have become a model for listening to stakeholders.



Karl Kupers, former Western SARE Administrative Council chair, responds to participants at the Pacific Northwest Subregional Conference as AC members, from left, Dan Long, Peg Perreault, Stacie Clary, and Mike Harrington, along with conference moderator, Jerry DeWitt, look on.

Here are details on how Western SARE is responding.

### Immediate response

To honor and acknowledge the time, energy and input participants offered at subregional conferences, the Western SARE Administrative Council awarded competitive grants, up to \$50,000 each, to applicants addressing a need stated at the conference.

With AC guidance and quick staff work, these grants were solicited, reviewed and awarded within 90 days of each conference, a feat few similarly constructed listening sessions can claim. (Grant summaries can be found on pages 8-28.)

“Getting the grant applications out, and funded so quickly, was huge and significant,” said Karl Kupers, past AC chair. “These grants helped us put these dollars in a stronger position with a direct response to stated needs.”

### Near-Term Actions

In March 2011, and again in August 2011, at its semi-annual meetings, the Western SARE Administrative Council spent several intense hours discussing the key points raised in the subregional con-

ferences and winnowing them to several items for action now:

- In response to frequently expressed concerns about the West’s often inadequate agricultural infrastructure, Western SARE will host and sponsor a regionwide conference in Portland, Ore., December 2012, that focuses on ways to build and improve infrastructure.
- Another oft-cited conference issue – water and its quantity, quality and conservation – will be addressed by partnering with a major western organization to co-sponsor a regional conference on sustaining agricultural water use.
- Food safety and buying local were topics raised at every subregional conference. Western SARE hopes to link its resources with those of the National SARE Outreach Office to develop information sheets on 1) the benefits of buying locally grown food, aimed at consumers, and 2) a reference guide and checklist for producers on food safety.
- Acknowledging expressed



“These conferences actually changed my life! I gained new perspectives from the experience and creativity in the room.”

— Cindy Lair, AC Chair  
from Colorado



“For me, this is one of those experiences you never forget. I’ve been very touched by what I’ve seen and heard from you.”

— Dan Long, AC member  
from Oregon



*"I'm confident that there has been a paradigm shift in grants and a shift in where research should go as a result of these conferences."*

— Karl Kupers, past AC Chair, from Washington State



*"There's a lack of connect between research results and end users. We really need to take this seriously."*

— Mike Harrington, AC member from Colorado



## WESTERN AC TAKES ACTION...

from page 3

concerns about serving socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, Western SARE is broadening its linkages with these individuals and the groups that serve them.

- The need to educate youth about agriculture and its sustainability was emphasized at every conference. To reach school-age and other groups, SARE is expanding its "NOBLE" Speakers Bureau to include producer grant recipients, project cooperators and others as well as adapting current Producer Grant and Producer + Professional Grant calls to better address this type of educational experience.
  - Western SARE is crafting a "hybrid" Research & Education Call for Proposals that requires applicants to address all aspects of sustainability and more fully engage producer cooperators with the potential for extending the funded grant.
- On deck, pending time and resources, are several additional projects that respond to priority issues raised at the subregional conferences:
- Develop a white paper, through a targeted call for proposals, that analyzes the costs and benefits of social and environmental factors in sustainable agriculture.
  - Develop novel ways to encourage "on-site" education projects on research farms or exemplary farms that address all three legs of the "sustainability stool" – economic viability, environmental soundness and social responsibility.

(For more details on response to priorities, visit this site: [www.westernsare.org/About-Us/About-Western-](http://www.westernsare.org/About-Us/About-Western-)



In Hawaii, AC members Peg Perreault, Cindy Lair, Stacie Clary, Rick Melnicoe and Chuck Boerner listen to reports.

### SARE/AC-Sets-Priorities.)

AC member Rick Melnicoe of California observed that these priorities extracted from conference comments have focused AC attention on the "most relevant issues."

Now, he said, "The AC has a daunting task to maintain priorities as time goes on."

### Changes in Process

Based on conference input, several changes have been made in the Western SARE grant process.

Owing to the overwhelming positive response from conference participants about the networking values of the conferences, recipients of Research & Education Grants will increase producer-to-producer networking and education, including field days, field tours, on-farm demonstrations, workshops and other social connections. Recipients will also ramp up outreach to producers and agricultural professionals.

To ensure inclusivity for all involved in agriculture, wording has been changed in calls for proposals to allow for the full scope of agricultural production and producers.

A priority that arose in every subregional conference was systems research. Western SARE has since been involved in nationwide and international systems conferences. Indeed, the "hybrid" Research & Education Grant being developed embraces the concept of a renewable 'true whole-farm systems grant,' farm to fork with off-farm inputs and impacts included.

These process changes are likely to be significant.

"One of the biggest impact from these conferences is that we are going to get more high quality grants from these subregions," said AC member Chuck Boerner of Hawaii.

### Educating SARE

A key to engaging and responding to participants was attendance at each conference by members of the Western SARE Administrative Council, which makes funding and strategic planning decisions. That council members attended, that they listened and that they have responded to what they heard has demonstrated a sincerity many conference participants said is unusual from a government agency.

"These conferences were convincing evidence to stakeholders that SARE cares," said AC member Melnicoe.

The Council members' experience, which provided them with a more intimate awareness of each subregion, is proving invaluable as they mull grant proposals for funding.

Cindy Lair, incoming AC chair, said that through information sharing, she found herself letting go of long-held views to learn from the innovative people attending.

"I surprised myself," said Lair, "to see layers of hard opinions be peeled away because I was being exposed to so much grassroots knowledge."

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## ... WITH FOLLOW-UP RESPONSES

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Melnicoe agreed.

"I now have a much greater appreciation for the diversity of the western region," he said. "I thought I had a pretty good grasp of the issues, but was missing many of the subtle local issues."

Likewise, attendance at each conference by many of Western SARE's state and protectorate coordinators not only provided attendees with yet another display of SARE's sincerity, but also produced cross-pollination and sharing among key players in SARE's lineup. The Western SARE coordinators – 17 in all, each focusing on SARE education and outreach activities in their respective state or protectorate – provided valuable perspective and expertise during listening sessions, and they absorbed ideas and perspectives they are now applying on their own turf.

### Educating Attendees

SARE staff developed 140 posters describing successful SARE-funded projects across the region. Poster handouts allowed participants to "take the posters with them," and most grant recipients of featured projects were able to attend and respond to queries.

When participants learned of the many impacts of Western SARE program grants, the common refrain was that SARE needs to increase outreach efforts. "Why didn't we know about this before?" many asked.

In response to requests for more outreach by Western SARE, the new full-time communications specialist will focus on increasing the release of information about SARE and the results of its funded grants to wider audiences through a wider array of information venues, including electronic social media.

### Value in Linkages

Networking was frequently



Jill Auburn, former National Director of SARE, responds to a query at the Southwest Subregional in Albuquerque.

cited as one of the greatest values of the conferences. Because participants were drawn, by invitation, from wide and varied segments of the agricultural community, many had never interacted one with another before. As these might be billed as nontraditional gatherings, they were not constructed of the usual mix of participants found at many industry- or government-sponsored conferences.

While this value was characteristic of all seven conferences, it was especially important in Alaska and the Pacific Islands, including Hawaii, where geography and travel costs often inhibit gathering such a diverse audience into a single venue.

"The people who attended these really came away with a feeling that they had been heard," said Boerner.

Jill Auburn, former National SARE director and now with the office of the chief scientist of USDA's Research, Education and Economics mission area, noted the value of these linkages.

"The conferences helped to bring in some new people at a very opportune time," she said, "when the concept and applicability of sustainable agriculture are growing."

### A Model for Listening

While many methods can be employed for gauging the pulse of agriculture at the grassroots level, the seven listening sessions provided a ground-truthing, confirming which issues and ideas are important, at the same time raising many beneath the radar. Several observers see Western SARE's subregional process as a model worth emulating.

Dena Leibman, communications specialist for National SARE, wondered how often producers' vision for agriculture is translated into real dollars for advancing that vision.

"Western SARE's subregional conferences," said Leibman, "have accomplished just that: brought farmers and ranchers together with supporting educators and government agents, asked them to brainstorm about their area's agricultural needs, then used that input to set Western SARE's grant-making priorities.

"This is real communication snowballing into real change for local and regional food systems," Leibman continued. "Western SARE's subregionals are a model for grant makers everywhere."

Auburn agreed: "I think the process was excellent – well thought out, expertly facilitated by Jerry DeWitt and the staff work to bring the consolidated results back to the group – all excellent. I do think it's well worth emulating by others."

Kim Kroll, deputy administrator of National SARE, said he shared the Western SARE subregional process with other SARE regions and sees opportunity for other government agencies to engage the process.

"I think that conducting the conferences was well worth the investment," said Kroll. "I think the process and format are well worthy of repetition."



*"The Western SARE AC was able to gather invaluable input on priorities and set an agenda for many years to come. The conferences were convincing evidence that SARE cares."*

— Rick Melnicoe, AC member from California



*"The biggest impact on the Western SARE program from the conferences is that we are going to get more high quality grants from these regions. There will definitely be a long-lasting effect."*

— Chuck Boerner, AC member from Hawaii

## HOW DID THEY DO THAT...?

### Conference Format

With minor variations, each conference followed this agenda:

#### Day 1

- Welcome by local dignitary
- Opening remarks, Jerry DeWitt
- Local presentations on the state of the subregion
- Break/poster session
- Lunch
- SARE overview and conference instructions, Phil Rasmussen
- Tabletop discussions, Burning Questions 1-3
- Break
- Tabletop discussions, Burning Questions 4-6
- Evaluation survey
- Dinner/Reception

#### Day 2

- Prioritize Day 1 comments
- Break
- Table leader reports
- Administrative Council response
- Open microphone
- Evaluation survey
- Close and thanks

In late 2006, the Western SARE Administrative Council, with encouragement from SARE staff, launched the major initiative known as the Western SARE Subregional Conferences.

To craft a plan for this grassroots ear-to-the-ground exercise, the staff hit the ground running to answer a raft of questions:

- How can the Western Region be divided into logical subregions?
- Who will be invited to attend?
- How will conferences be structured?
- How will responses be elicited from participants?
- How will information gathered be processed?
- How will information gathered be used?

A primary conference objective was to gather input from constituents that would help guide the Administrative Council's strategic planning in the months and years ahead. To adhere to that objective, a plan was needed by which each subregional conference could mirror the other – not in attendance or content, but in the questions asked and the method by which those questions were asked and the responses recorded.

The following describes the Western SARE Subregional Conference template and the building blocks that created it, blocks honed and smoothed as the process evolved.

### Defining Subregions

SARE's Western Region encompasses 17 political entities (13 states and four Pacific island protectorates), but it includes any number of geographic and ecological subregions, ranging from mountain to desert, from arctic to tropical.

The subregions ultimately created considered a combination of political, ecological

and cultural boundaries. For example, a geographic delineation might logically group Pacific islands protectorates with Hawaii. But political and agriculture differences suggested otherwise. California's distinction was based on agriculture, culture, ecology and politics. And Alaska shares few traits with other regions.

Although the seven subregions defy simple categorization, each is well contained as a definable entity – tropical for the subregional held in Guam, subtropical in Kona, HI, Arctic in Fairbanks, desert Southwest in Albuquerque, Mediterranean in Visalia, CA, High Plains and Intermountain in Cheyenne and Pacific Northwest in Spokane – and their number fit with Western SARE's time and resource capabilities for conducting the conferences.

### Call for Proposals

To ensure local boots on the ground, the Administrative Council issued calls for proposals for each subregion. The calls offered enough flexibility to allow local flavor and autonomy, at the same time outlining specific parameters that would ensure continuity among all conferences. The local teams provided guidance on who should be invited.

The Western SARE staff met with the principal investigators of each grant-receiving subregional team, starting with those for the Pacific, Southwest and Mountain/High Plains conferences. This initial meeting helped to shape several conference specifics that would help in planning those that followed. For example, it was decided that attendance would be by invitation, rather than open to all. This would ensure

that attendees were drawn from all representative sectors of agriculture (production, education, government, business and non-profit) at the same time keeping the number of attendees at a manageable level.

### Burning Questions

As conference logistics were falling into place, SARE staff solicited from key constituents input on developing



From left, Western SARE staff members Jim Belliston, Chod Stephens and Bob Newhall record comments.

questions that would serve as the stimulus and fulcrum for discussion at each subregional conference.

This process evolved through several iterations as a means of refining "the burning questions" that would elicit accurate feedback on the issues and challenges for sustaining each subregion's agriculture. Asking the same questions at each conference provided continuity among responses, enabling comparisons among subregions. This approach was not meant to provide a statistical underpinning for conference evaluation, but rather to allow the Administrative Council to better equate and weight responses from varied subregions.

### One Moderator

Another measure to ensure continuity among the conferences and the information gathered was to harness the skills of a single, well-qualified

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## ...A GUIDE TO THE PROCESS

*from previous page*

person to moderate all seven subregional conferences.

Jerry DeWitt, a three-time acting director of National SARE and former director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, agreed to fill the role. Not only did DeWitt moderate all conferences, he helped develop and refine the conference plan. And he is currently playing a key role in facilitating the strategic plan that is evolving from the wealth of information gathered from the conferences.

### Listening Sessions

The conferences were designed to listen to, and educate, those attending. Listening sessions are hardly novel, nor are facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions an untried method for lending an ear. But the scope and breadth of the Western SARE undertaking may have been distinctive as an effort to tap the collective pulse of Western SARE's widely dispersed and varied constituency.

Facilitators and recorders – mainly members of Western SARE's Administrative Council, Western SARE staff, state and protectorate coordinators and local university educators – were briefed onsite with guidelines for their respective roles. By their very nature, roundtable discussions can, at times, verge on chaos, a challenge both for the facilitator to keep participants on track and for the recorder to extract accurate meaning from expression. All participants at each table were given a voice, and group editing helped achieve reasonable accuracy for the thousands of individual comments recorded. Facilitators were specifically instructed to draw out comments from each and every participant.

In addition to these re-

corded comments, a representative from each table, selected on the first day of discussion, reported on the table's conversation, adding group or personal thoughts, many not previously captured. These free-ranging post-discussion comments took many forms: from editorial thoughts about issues raised, or not raised, to critiques of things done well or that could have been done better, to expressions of thanks to Western SARE for hosting the conference and listening to their concerns.

More comments were captured in open-microphone sessions, expanding the breadth of expression for each subregion. Importantly, members of the Western SARE Administrative Council gathered at the front of the room to listen and respond to both table leader reports and open-microphone comments.

Evaluation surveys on the first and second days also became valuable repositories for attendee input.

### Educating Sessions

While many of the conference participants had some inkling of SARE and the concepts of sustaining agriculture, not all were well versed in the subjects. To help address those gaps, conference moderator DeWitt and Phil Rasmussen, Western SARE Regional coordinator, offered brief tutorials in Western SARE, including progress made in recent years to sustain agriculture and the workings of the SARE program.

In addition, local invited speakers set the stage for discussion groups by sharing their expertise and perspectives on the state of agriculture and sustainability in their respective subregions.

To further highlight Western SARE impact on the ground, staff developed posters displaying results of a sampling of successful SARE-

funded projects within each subregion. The content for each poster was provided on one-page handouts.

On the first day of the conference, a one-hour poster session was held, with many of the project coordinators on hand, so participants could acquaint themselves with the impacts of SARE on the ground. The posters remained on display to conference end.

Many invited participants said they wanted help with grant writing, so SARE staff, at the end of each subregional, presented a grant-writing workshop. Attendance varied, but typically included 15-20% of conference participants.

### Info Processing

A collection of more than 7,000 individual comments – gathered through roundtable discussions, oral reports and surveys – can be seen on one hand as a great treasure, on the other as an overwhelming mountain of data to climb.

Streamlining the data began at each subregion as Western SARE staff imported first-day responses to burning questions, captured by recorders on oversize Post-It notepads, into Excel. The responses were then categorized and collated – a task that took staff deep into the night, but which provided real-time turnaround of ranked results from the first day. These were printed and delivered to participants first thing the next morning for discussion and prioritization.

In sum, SARE staff members spent countless hours sorting, collating and evaluating these comments, a distinctive exercise that was key to the success of the conferences. The Western SARE Administrative Council has reviewed these ranked responses using data-mining tools, followed by intense discussion and analysis. (See pages 3-5.)



*University of Wyoming's Dallas Mount, left, discusses his poster with Montana rancher Jess Alger.*



*Oregon Extension Educator Nick Andrews records comments in California.*



*Oregon rancher Dan Carver provides his thoughts as a table representative at the Pacific Northwest Subregional Conference.*



Ilene Iriarti served as a conference recorder.



Producer Rick Guererro of Guam.



## PACIFIC SUBREGIONAL

The warm embrace Western SARE received from Pacific islanders for the first of its seven subregional conferences was exceeded only by their enthusiasm and preparation.

More than 100 producers and ag-support professionals from Guam, Micronesia, American Samoa and the Northern Mariana islands had pored over and digested burning questions Western SARE developed and sent to them as a fulcrum for discussion.

“We are here to listen,” conference moderator Jerry DeWitt assured participants from Pacific Island groups as he launched the conference at the Hilton Guam on Tumon Bay. “We need your ideas for planning the future of Western SARE. You are the first of our subregional conferences, and we’re going to listen to meet your needs as a grower, as a researcher, as a non-profit. We’re going to start with your ideas and we’re going to build on that.”

Ideas he and the West’s Administrative Council got. From island-group presentations came an outpouring of challenges for navigating agriculture’s future in the Pacific and suggestions for how Western SARE could help (see Priorities at right). And that was even before two half days of facilitated roundtable listening sessions, where conversations continued through breaks and meals.

Bob Barber, SARE coordinator on Guam and a conference organizer, said that having island teams brainstorm core topics in advance set the stage for success.

“This tuned the instrument before the concert so we were able to play beautiful



Some of the attendees at the Pacific conference gathered to portray the diversity of the Western Pacific islands.

music,” said Barber.

As Western SARE’s Administrative Council and staff soon learned, Pacific island agriculture operates on a small scale, often at subsistence levels. The U.S. government and other countries provide a wide range of assistance in the islands, but the farming and ranching community is hungry for technical assistance and guidance.

“Most of our farmers are subsistence,” said Ali Badilles, an ag educator from Rota. “This conference increased my self-confidence as an extension agent to increase advocacy for SARE and to help my clients attain sustainability while protecting the environment.”

The Pacific islands stretch across an area larger than the continental United States, so travel and its costs often become barriers to addressing needs. The SARE conference helped bridge a communications gap, and participants cited cross-pollination as one of its most important outcomes for connecting producers with

each other as well as with educators and agency personnel.

Bob Bishop, a producer from Palau, cited a long list of benefits from the conference, but he added, “One of the greatest benefits was ‘sharing and caring’ and mutual enrichment.”

Jocelyn Bamba, NRCS district conservationist on Guam, agreed with the value of sharing experiences with people from across the Pacific.

“Meeting other technical professionals who have assisted participants was very valuable,” said Bamba. “For those of us with tight budgets, it is rare to meet farmers, ranchers and professionals from across our region.”

Jim Currie, a vice president with the College of Micronesia on Pohnpei, said distance and personnel are challenges for Micronesia.

“We need a SARE coordinator on Pohnpei and an

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### Pacific Priorities

- Develop or refine on-island livestock production systems, including feeds and genetics
- Assist with marketing of local agricultural production
- Work on sustainable on-island agricultural systems

**In brief...**

- October 17-18, 2007
- Agana, Guam
- 100+ Attendees
  - ~ 33% Farmer and Rancher
  - ~ 25% Government Agency
  - ~ 35% Educator
  - ~ 7% NGO/Agribusiness
- 500+ individual comments recorded
- 20 posters on SARE grants
- On-site Coordinators:
  - ~ Bob Barber, Extension Economist, University of Guam
  - ~ Manuel Duguies, Extension Livestock Agent, University of Guam
- AC Members Attending: Chuck Boerner, HI; Stacie Clary, CA; Cindy Lair, CO; Rick Melnicoe, CA
- Area Covered: Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, American Samoa

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associate coordinator on the Marshall Islands and Palau,” said Currie. “And we need funding so Guam, the Marianas, Micronesia and American Samoa can come together once a year for a Pacific conference.”

The conference raised interest in seeking grant dollars. Alan Sabaldica, Western SARE coordinator for the Mariana Islands, said that the increased awareness the conference stimulated has added to his workload as more producers have sought



Ali Badilles of Rota, in red, makes a point during a roundtable discussion.

help with writing grants.

The Pacific conference featured 20 posters on SARE-funded grants, on topics like soil improvement, aquaculture and livestock forage. Bob Bishop of Palau valued the poster information enough that he has since applied practices learned at the conference from eight of them.

Manny Duguies, University of Guam livestock specialist and a conference organizer, said he appreciated the post-conference grant addressing a critical issue raised during the listening session. (See the grant summary on page 10.)

“It demonstrated the sincerity and genuine concern of the Western SARE Administrative Council to assist producers with their issues,” said Duguies, “as compared with other conferences where everything ends in the proceedings.”

Bishop of Palau was equally impressed with SARE’s re-

sponsiveness, acknowledging changes in grant programs based on requests from conference participants.

“Western SARE is the most proactive and responsive of the entities serving producers,” said Bishop. “Western SARE stands out because its leadership is approachable.”

Guam SARE coordinator Barber cited the chemistry of the conference. “I’ve never seen this kind of representation from so many islands at one conference,” he said. “This is the best conference I’ve ever attended in my career.”

Barber noted that the conference brought in a lot of producers, which, in turn, brought in a lot of enthusiasm and expectations.

“You can’t let it die,” he cautioned Western SARE. “They don’t want to see it stop.”

Skip Cowell, who attended from Hawaii, echoed Barber’s



Pamela Aguon of Saipan.



Louis Bumoon of Yap.



Gilbert Macaranas, left, and Joe Lizama of Tinian.



Project coordinator  
Manny Duguies

## PACIFIC RESPONSE GRANT

- **Title:** Replacing Feed Imports with Local Feed Resources in the Western Pacific
- **Priority Addressed:** On-island livestock production, including feedstuffs and genetics
- **Coordinator:** Manuel Duguies, Extension Livestock Agent, University of Guam
- **Amount Funded:** \$47,207
- **Project Number:** SW09-304

### Situation

On Western Pacific islands, swine producers rely either on imported feeds or on locally grown feedstuffs like breadfruit, banana, taro and coconut.

Imports can improve animal performance, but are costly. Local feeds are abundant and relatively inexpensive but are often fed randomly without knowledge of nutrition or animal performance.

This grant proposed filling the knowledge gap by demonstrating the best local feeds and feeding practices.

### Actions

A farmer-to-farmer networking group surveyed producers on common local feeds, practices for processing and feeding and animal growth and health. The survey pinpointed 21 commonly used materials, which were processed by drying, shredding, grinding and fermenting. Individual materials and ration formulations mixed from them were ana-

lyzed for nutrient content.

Results of the feed analysis and subsequent feeding trials were presented at workshops on Guam, Yap, Palau, Pohnpei, Kosrae and Saipan to 140 producers, students and ag professionals.

In addition, grinders, mixers, shredders and coconut graders were sent to four sites to demonstrate feed processing.

### Results/Impacts

Nutrient analyses of the 21 local feeds showed values comparable to those of traditional feeds, especially for energy, and suitable for satisfying nutritional needs for growing and breeding hogs as well as pullet poultry.

One trial showed that grower pigs fed a ration of 25% fermented breadfruit, 25% grated coconut and 50% commercial grower feeds gained more weight than grower pigs fed 100% commercial feeds. In another trial, hogs readily consumed local feeds and performed as well as or better than hogs fed commercial feeds. (No scales were available to record weights.)

Producers learned that, depending on availability, local feeds can replace 25-75% of



Workshop participants learn about operating a shredder to produce feed.



commercial feeds for producing hogs. They also learned that extra effort is needed to properly prepare the feeds and maximize their benefits.

### Farmer Adoption

Eight Pohnpei farmers now use a shredder to process taro, banana and coconut to feed pigs.

A Guam hog producer began feeding breadfruit and swamp taro.

The Yap State Department of Agriculture now feeds fish and cooked banana to breeding swine and is exploring the processing of breadfruit and tapioca.

Breadfruit, banana, coconut and roots crops are now being considered both for feed and windbreak values.

### Future

This study prompted goat and aquaculture producers to look at replacing imported feedstuffs with local products. And it showed the need for amino acid surveys to establish protein values; alternative energy sources to run processing equipment; and an economic analysis on costs and returns.



Breadfruit, a commonly available local feed, works well, especially when fermented.

## SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL

When the 100 ranchers, farmers and their supporters gathered in Albuquerque June 2008 for the Western SARE Subregional Conference, they were challenged to speak their hearts and minds.

"If we're not getting pushback or criticism, we may not be fulfilling our mission," said Jim Dyer, a local speaker and director of the Southwest Marketing Network.

Jill Auburn, then national director of SARE, encouraged creativity.

"We can pose the questions," said Auburn, "but the

answers are in the hearts and minds of creative thinkers out on the landscape."

The conference participants met Auburn and Dyer's introductory challenges, offering more than 500 individual comments during two half days of facilitated and recorded tabletop discussions at the Best Western Rio Grande.

The comments reflected issues critical to agriculture in the Southwest, particularly water and its quantity and fate, the need to engage youth in agriculture and reaching out to underserved audiences (see Priorities on page 12).

Dennis Lamm, SARE coordinator in Colorado and a conference organizer, cited several values he observed from the conference, namely an appreciation for 'local,' especially as applied to food systems; that agricultural diversity in the region is both a value and a challenge; and that youth must be educated about agriculture as "they are the future."

Lamm expressed surprise at the number of attendees not previously familiar with SARE. Indeed, the conference itself not only informed participants about Western SARE and its efforts to sustain agriculture in the Southwest, it also helped bridge some gaps.

"This was by far one of the most effective and viable interactions between federal



New Mexico ranchers Trudi and John Kretsinger consult.

government programs and its citizenry I've attended in my four-plus decades of professional efforts," said one participant in a survey at the conference.

New Mexico rancher Trudi Kretsinger was equally gratified by the outreach the conference provided.

"I've been feeling a greater distance between us in the country and people in the city," Kretsinger said during an open-microphone session at the conference. "It feels like the separation is growing, but this kind of meeting is helping to bridge the gap."

Another survey respondent appreciated the diversity:

"The participants were a remarkable cross-section of Western agriculture. Each person I spoke with was knowledgeable and unique."

Stephanie Walker, SARE

*continued on page 12*



Western SARE PDP Coordinator Jim Freeburn chats with grant recipient Staci Emm of Nevada.



Margaret Campos of New Mexico.



Dennis Becenti of Arizona.

### In brief...

- June 10-12, 2008
- Albuquerque, New Mexico
- 70+ Attendees
  - ~ 35% Farmer and Rancher
  - ~ 7% Government Agency
  - ~ 45% Educator
  - ~ 13% NGO/Agribusiness
- 500+ individual comments recorded
- 22 posters on SARE grants
- On-site Coordinators:
  - ~ Dennis Lamm, Extension Specialist, Colorado State University, SARE Colorado Coordinator
  - ~ Jim Dyer, Director, Southwest Marketing Network, Colorado
  - ~ Stephanie Walker, Extension Vegetables Specialist, New Mexico State University, SARE New Mexico Coordinator
- AC Members Attending: Jill Auburn, Washington, DC; Don Bustos, NM; Stacie Clary, CA; Mark Frasier, CO; Karl Kupers, WA; Rich Melnicoe, CA
- Area Covered: New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Southern Utah, Southern Colorado



## SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL

from page 11

coordinator in New Mexico and a conference organizer, said the intention was to invite producers who had not been involved with SARE and team them up with people who had done successful SARE projects.

“Deciding who to involve was the hard part,” said Walker. “People didn’t know each other, but the tabletop discussions created synergy.”

She added that the conference has created lasting enthusiasm.

“My phone has been ringing off the hook, and I anticipate more grant applications coming in,” said Walker. “People who knew little or nothing about SARE are now enthusiastic supporters of SARE. The conference was a huge success, way beyond my expectations. The event really fired up the passions for sustainable agriculture in New Mexico.”

Jeff Banks, a Utah extension agent, said that what he learned at the conference has enabled him to discuss broader options with producers who visit him when looking at making changes to their operations.

“The part I found the most valuable was the presentations of SARE grant recipients, both the formal and poster presentations,” said Banks.

The Southwest conference featured 22 posters on SARE grants in the region on topics like rangeland and riparian health, irrigation, marketing and season-extension techniques. The posters were well received, with comments like “very well done,” and “it is refreshing to see such innovative research and continued improvements.”

Arizona rancher Richard Collins, whose riparian monitoring project was featured



Above, moderator Jerry DeWitt engages conference participants during the poster session. Below, Sue Donaldson of Nevada and Lyle McNeal of Utah prepare to cast ballots for their priorities.



Cindy Torres of Colorado.



Richard Collins of Arizona.



on a poster, said he has used the poster over and over again for talks he’s given to local ranchers and at the University of Arizona.

Collins cited interaction with participants and what he learned from posters as the most important value from the SARE conference, and he was inspired by what he learned.

“I came back thinking about direct marketing, and my son, Rich, who now owns the ranch, is trying that route with beef.”

Dyer summed up the Southwest experience:

“It gave a sense of connectedness among beneficiaries and supporters of Western SARE,” he said. “Sometimes these people get together on a state-by-state basis, but this scale of networking rarely happens.”

### Southwest Priorities

- Find ways to implement sustainable and locally renewable energy systems
- Foster water conservation and focus on water quality, quantity, storage and methods of efficient use
- Develop partnerships with organizations serving underserved/disadvantaged communities related to Western SARE grants and outreach
- Provide on-farm education and experience for FFA, 4-H and other similar-age youth groups on sustainable agriculture techniques and practices

## Southwest Response Grant

- **Title:** Farm to Fork: Connecting Our Youth with Sustainable Agriculture
- **Priority Addressed:** On-farm experiences and education for youth in sustainable agriculture techniques and practices
- **Coordinators:** Tisha Casida, Publisher of That's Natural!, which promotes ag sustainability; Dennis Lamm, Professor and Extension Specialist, Colorado State University, Western SARE Colorado State Coordinator
- **Amount Funded:** \$48,988
- **Project Number:** SW-09-401

### Situation

Few kids in public or private schools receive formal education these days on the source of food, how it's produced and how production can be sustained.

To help students connect with their food and the people who grow it, this SARE grant proposed creating a hands-on curriculum that involved farmers and ranchers and could serve as a model for use in any classroom.

### Actions

Several aspects of sustainable agriculture were selected to showcase at the schools, and the project team contacted local sustainable producers to create parts of a curriculum applicable to their operations. The team also contacted local elementary school teachers to gauge interest in partnering to produce and implement the curriculum.

Producers and recruited community members wrote



Urban farmer Susan Fries talks with 1st through 5th graders about what it takes to grow plants.

“talking-points” for the curriculum in which they would be involved, yielding this curriculum:

- Lesson 1 – Introduction and What Does “Sustainable” Mean?
- Lesson 2 – Seed Introduction
- Lesson 3 – Growing a Garden
- Lesson 4 – Beneficial Insects
- Lesson 5 – Grass Pastures and Ranching
- Lessons 6 & 7 – Cooking with Local Food

Several activities were developed to tie into the lessons, including The Seed Game, How to Plant a Garden, Mini Pizzas and Puzzle Sandwiches.

The curriculum and activities, designed for grades 1-5, were tested and implemented in an after-school program in Pueblo, Colorado, connecting with more than 80 students. Another activity that evolved from the SARE grant was a “Green Day” celebration for 300 kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students organized by Heritage Elementary in Pueblo.

### Results/Impacts

Based on feedback from teachers, students and producers, the curriculum has been a success, and at least 15 additional schools in southwest Colorado have expressed interest.

Students learned about food and producers connected with future consumers. The opportunity helped producers learn how they might better market their goods in their communities.

Further, producers involved expressed interest in hosting students “out on the farm with their hands in the dirt.”

And several schools in southern Colorado are implementing school gardens and conducting projects that involved students in growing their own food.

Tisha Casida, project coordinator, said these activities have become part of the value-chain of sustainable agriculture, planting the seeds of knowledge with students, educators, producers and community members.

“It all starts with the first seed being planted – that first step in getting our children and youth involved with programs and projects that are a part of agriculture,” she said.



Tisha Casida is coordinating the youth education project.

## HAWAII SUBREGIONAL



In an environment where geographic barriers – like an ocean – can make face-to-face interaction a challenge, it's not surprising that participants in the Hawaii Subregional Conference cited networking as one of the most important outcomes.

"I found the Kona conference to be valuable largely in providing the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people working in and thinking about different facets of sustainable agriculture," said Paul Reppun, a Big Island producer. "Some of the contacts have been continued and are valuable."

Reppun was one of about 100 farmers, ranchers and ag-support people who gathered September 2008 at the Keauhou Beach Hotel in Kona for the Western SARE Subregional Conference. During the listening session, enabled by facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions, participants offered more than 900 individual ideas and comments.

Additional comments were gathered in surveys conducted each day of the conference, in reports from a representative of each of the 11 roundtable discussion groups and in post-



At left, Big Island Rep. Cliff Tsuji votes on a priority issue for Hawaii agriculture. Below, Tova Callender of Maui and Glenn Shinsato of Oahu.



Former Sen. Russell Kokubun, now director of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture.



conference questionnaires.

An important topic raised frequently was food security and a concern that so much of Hawaii's food and agricultural inputs are imported. Participants also encouraged SARE to engage youth and underserved audiences through partnerships with existing organizations. (See Hawaii Priorities below.)

In addition to setting priori-

ties for sustaining Hawaii agriculture and learning about SARE and sustainable agriculture, participants extracted additional values from the conference.

Glenn Shinsato, a hog producer from Oahu, said he gained an insight into what other farmers are doing, both from other attendees and formal presentations.

"It also showed me that there were common problems that may require very different solutions for each farmer," Shinsato said.

One survey respondent said the tabletop discussion was the "best part of the conference." Said another, "The opportunity to exchange ideas with like-minded people was invaluable. These conversations will certainly continue after the conference."

In an open-microphone session, Susan Matsushima, a former member and chair of the Western SARE Administrative Council, noted that many conference participants had not heard of SARE prior



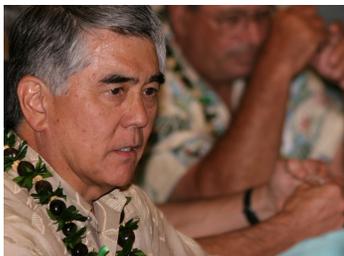
Claire Sullivan of Oahu.

### Hawaii Priorities

- Find ways to reduce on-farm inputs and fuel costs and increase on-farm fertilizer production
- Set up tropical sustainable demonstration farm/garden projects at the community, school or family level
- Encourage locally grown, locally marketed and locally consumed foods
- Develop partnerships with organizations serving underserved/disadvantaged communities related to Western SARE grants and outreach
- Conduct on-farm education/experience for FFA, 4-H and other similar-aged youth groups on sustainable agriculture techniques and practices

**In brief...**

- September 22-24, 2008
- Kailua-Kona, Hawaii
- 100+ Attendees
  - ~ 50% Farmer and Rancher
  - ~ 8% Government Agency
  - ~ 30% Educator
  - ~ 12% NGO/Agribusiness
- 900+ individual comments recorded
- 17 posters on SARE grants
- On-site Coordinators:
  - ~ Jonathan Deenik, Soil Scientist, University of Hawaii
  - ~ Jody Smith, Education Specialist in Sustainable Renewable Resources Extension, University of Hawaii
  - ~ Virginia Easton-Smith, Hawaii County Extension Agent, Kailua-Kona
  - ~ Ty McDonald, Assistant Extension Agent, Kailua-Kona
- AC Members Attending: Chuck Boerner, HI; Stacie Clary, CA; Karl Kupers, WA; Cindy Lair, HA; Rick Melnicoe, CA, Peg Per-rault, CO
- Area Covered: Hawaii



Above, Hawaii attendees chat during the poster session. At left, University of Hawaii Agriculture Dean Andy Hashimoto.

The Hawaii conference featured 17 posters describing results of Western SARE-funded grants in the islands, on topics like tropical agroforestry, fruit marketing, cover crops and banana and taro disease management. Surveys showed that participants liked learning about SARE projects through the posters, but several said the poster session was too short to absorb all the information.

University of Hawaii Ag Dean Andrew Hashimoto, in a conference presentation, said that his own college had been working on strategic planning. The key, he said, is finding balance in productivity, economics and impacts on communities, the pillars of sustainability.

Hashimoto personally invited several important Hawaii leaders to the conference, including Rep. Clifford Tsuji and Sen. Russell Kokubun, who has since been appointed director of agriculture in Hawaii.

Jody Smith, UH Sustainable Ag Education Specialist and a conference planner, observed that the professional conduct of the conference, and its results, have secured the credibility of Western SARE in Hawaii and raised its visibility.

“I observed an astonishing level of effort and energy expended by the Western SARE staff, far beyond conventional levels of service,” said Smith. “The conference could not have been successful without their ‘above and beyond’ support.”

One survey respondent urged Western SARE to respond to the conference with substantive evidence of action to counter the impression that conferences are a waste of time.

Indeed, Big Island farmer Reppun suggested that another conference could be timely as “a lot of consciousness-raising has occurred at all levels of society, and there is pressure for change in the air.” He added, “The stirring together of anxious minds in a melting pot is reason enough for a conference.”

A survey response reinforced the idea:

“This conference was so valuable to me,” wrote the participant. “People have given tremendous thought to what will benefit agricultural efforts for the entire state. I wish all government-funded departments that serve the agricultural community had this format to listen to industry needs.”



Former Western SARE AC chair Susan Matsu-shima of Oahu.



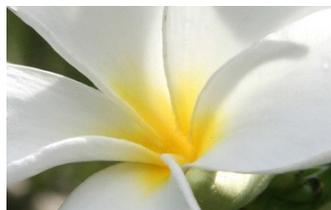
Big Island producer Charlie Reppun.

*from previous page*

to the conference, and she urged Western SARE to do a better job of getting information to producers as well as doing a better job of educating people at all levels, including grade school students and consumers.

Matsushima also encourage improved relations in the agricultural community.

“Farmers need to work together. If you’re not going to work together, you’re not going to survive.”



Project coordinator  
Glenn Teves.

## HAWAII RESPONSE GRANT

- **Title:** Sustaining Molokai Native Hawaiian Families
- **Priorities Addressed:** Set up a sustainable demonstration farm at the family level; find ways to reduce farm inputs
- **Coordinator:** Glenn Teves, Molokai County Extension Agent
- **Amount Funded:** \$47,420
- **Project Number:** SW09-502

### Situation

As the country's most isolated state, Hawaii finds itself vulnerable in food security. The stored-food inventory is estimated at one week, down from 20 days 20 years ago. And a survey of Hawaii Island farmers shows they import 98% of their farm inputs.

Molokai, the least developed of Hawaii's eight major islands, is the only island where agriculture is the main economic driver. Further, 85% of its producers are native Hawaiian, a group USDA deems underserved and disadvantaged.

Many Molokai producers are locked in a comfortable mono-cropping mindset, resulting in production of a lot of just a few crops. Increasing crop diversity could increase the supply of locally grown food and create a more balanced and biologically diverse cropping system.

This grant proposed to help producers overcome reluctance or inability to invest in technologies needed to try new crops using five demonstrations on farms of producers currently engaged in mono-cropping.

### Actions

Meetings were held with the five growers, who produce



sweet potato, watermelons or papaya, to discuss potential new crops, production needs and compatibility with the existing crop as well as potential problems and marketing.

Field inspections pinpointed demonstration sites, and the producers prepared the sites for the new crops. Soil samples gauged fertility. As plants mature, tissue samples will gauge plant nutrition. Ongoing producer education focuses on management and cultural practices.

Producers are maintaining records on production costs, both for their own benefit and for educational materials to share with other farmers. One field day has been held to share information.

### Results/Impacts

Four of the five demonstration farms are in various stages of implementation. Three are adding taro and one is incorporating papaya. The fifth farm will plant eggplant in 2011.

The producers have been acquiring local crop inputs, including fishbone meal and coral lime.

Crop monitoring so far has revealed predictable insect infestations, no nematodes and a virus on some plants. The infected plants have been

Above, banana plants provide a windbreak for taro planted and marketed as part of this post-subregional grant on Molokai.



removed, and remaining plants will be assessed as virus-free plants for propagation material.

So far, participants have marketed taro corms and sold some products made from taro.

The field day prompted several producers to adopt sustainable practices seen on demonstration farms and apply local inputs.

### Next Steps

In addition to maintaining their new crops, participants will monitor the plant biological environment, collecting soil and tissue samples. Recorded production levels and costs will be published in an extension bulletin and posted on the university website.

# Mountain & High Plains Subregional

As Jacob Cowgill, a new Montana farmer, pondered conversations unfolding at the Mountain and High Plains Subregional Conference in Cheyenne, he recalls that he was inspired by what others are doing.

"I remember thinking just how vast the world of sustainable agriculture is and the seemingly limitless creative solutions to particular issues," said Cowgill.

Cowgill was among 70 or so ranchers, farmers and ag-support people assembled at the Plains Hotel to learn about Western SARE and how it is working to sustain agriculture, and to provide their input on SARE's direction for the future.

Penny Trinca, an organic farmer from Utah, said she benefited from the roundtable discussions and the focused questions.

"What was of particular value to me in this session was to hear the widely differing viewpoints and positions from the conference participants," said Trinca. "While farmers and ranchers face many of the same challenges, the pressures and strategies are very different between rural Wyoming and the urbanizing Colorado Front Range."

Scott Zimmerman, a farmer and cooperative specialist from Wyoming, added, "The interaction among participants was very valuable to me."

Helen Atthowe, a Montana farmer and former extension



Colorado producer Lew Grant converses with Jessica Davis, a Colorado State researcher and SARE grant recipient.

agent, agreed. "It was great to hear from other folks around the region and find out what was similar and different in our experiences – the questions and expectations of sustainable agriculture."

Through facilitated and recorded roundtable discussion, participants offered more than 300 individual ideas focused on issues in the mountain and high plains region. Infrastructure, especially for small crop and livestock producers, was of major concern, as was youth education about agriculture and engaging underserved producers. (See list of Priorities on page 18.)

Cindy Garretson-Weibel of the Wyoming Business Council, in a local speaker presentation,

recommended that Western SARE focus, at a minimum, on extending growing seasons, developing small processing facilities, promoting alternative crops, education,

*continued on page 18*

## In brief...

- October 28-30, 2008
- Cheyenne, Wyoming
- 70+ Attendees
  - ~ 32% Farmer and Rancher
  - ~ 14% Government Agency
  - ~ 49% Educator
  - ~ 5% NGO/Agribusiness
- 300+ individual comments recorded
- 20 posters on SARE grants
- On-site Coordinators:
  - ~ Dennis Lamm, Professor and Extension Specialist, Colorado State University, Western SARE Colorado State Coordinator
  - ~ Jim Dyer, Director, Southwest Marketing Network, Colorado
- AC members attending: Mike Harrington, CO; Kim Kroll, Washington DC; Karl Kupers, WA; Cindy Lair, CO; Peg Perreault, CO; Deb Young, CO;
- Area Covered: Montana, Wyoming, Northern Utah, Northern Colorado



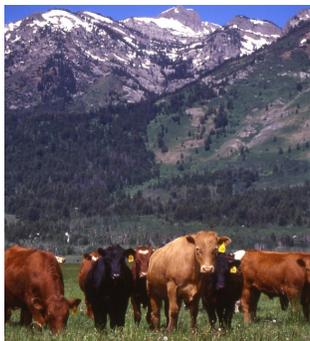
Perry Miller of Montana State University.



Tammy VerCauteren of Colorado.



Helen Atthowe of Montana describes her poster.



Wyoming producer Mike Ridenour.



Producer Bob Quinn of Montana.

## Mountain & High Plains Subregional

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ing producers about marketing and providing youth opportunities.

“Youth is the key,” she said. “Young people are innovative. There is a need for a program that’s a set-aside for youth projects.”

Surveys conducted during the conference offered a flavor of participant impressions. The panel discussion kicking off the gathering was described as “extremely useful to open the dialogue for the networking session.” There was “good input from participants,” and the conference afforded a “great idea exchange.”

Further, “The opportunities to network were good,” said a respondent. “You have a great, diverse, knowledgeable group that is fun to engage and work with.”

Cowgill agreed.

“Any time you get that caliber of folks in a room, the intellectual energy is undeniable. In my group, each person fed off the other.”

One survey respondent said such brainstorming is a great method, but only “if the suggestions are implemented.”

On hand to hear those suggestions were several



A roundtable discussion in Cheyenne.

members of Western SARE’s Administrative Council, which Wyoming farmer Mike Ridenour appreciated.

“I was intrigued by the diversity of the advisory board,” said Ridenour, who added that it was “enlightening to know how much work is funded by SARE that I did not know was happening.”

Much of that education was provided through 20 posters describing the results of Western SARE-funded grants on topics like cow-calf management, forage winter wheat, onion management, alfalfa stand life and raspberry research.

Trinca described the posters

as “great encapsulations of the projects,” adding that it was helpful to have the farmer or researcher involved in the grant on hand to answer questions and provide their experiences.

“I incorporated several of the principles into my operation,” she said.

Ridenour said he has taken the opportunity to deliver some of the ideas to local legislators.

“It is far more efficient to modify already-working models than reinvent the wheel,” he said.

Trinca has also been active in promoting SARE and its benefits.

“I personally write letters and emails to USDA and my elected officials telling them how important this program is to me and farmers like me, encouraging them to add money to SARE,” said Trinca.

Even with the goodwill generated from the conference, one participant wanted to make sure Western SARE responds to the attendees’ input.

“I hope that the grassroots principles forwarded in the tabletop answers are easily seen and implemented by the decision-makers overseeing the process.”

### Mountain and High Plains Priorities

- Develop model farms that demonstrate sustainable agricultural practices
- Conduct studies relating to the problems and opportunities of regional livestock processing plants, the infrastructure and the potential increased use of mobile processing facilities
- Facilitate local and regional foodshed development and implementation studies
- Study local and regional infrastructure development for agricultural processing (small- and medium-scale), cleaning, distributing, financing and consulting
- Develop partnerships with organizations serving underserved/disadvantaged communities related to Western SARE grants and outreach

## Mountain & High Plains Response Grant

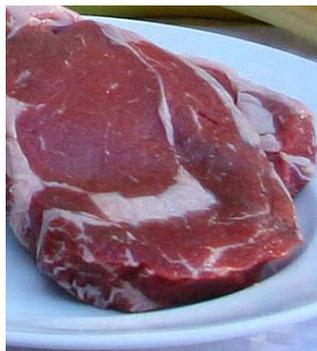
- **Title:** Infrastructure Support for Small Livestock Processing Facilities
- **Priority Addressed:** Conduct studies on regional livestock processing plants
- **Coordinator:** Jane Boles, Associate Professor of Meat Science, Montana State University
- **Amount Funded:** \$46,796
- **Project Number:** SW09-601

### Situation

To help ensure safe food, USDA is issuing new rules that require livestock processors, including small ones, to conduct microbial testing. These one-size-fits-all regulations place extra burden on small processors, which rarely have the technical skills to conduct validation studies or develop statistical sampling plans.

Concurrently, local food products are becoming more popular with consumers. Ranchers seeking to participate in marketing opportunity need local meat processors.

To comply with USDA rules, processing plants will need to validate current processes, develop written procedures that ensure consumer safety and provide statistical justifi-



cation to their sampling plans.

This grant seeks to help smaller livestock processing facilities comply with new and ever-changing food safety requirements.

### Actions

Using expertise from the Montana State University Meat Laboratory and the Montana meat and poultry inspector, the project coordinator asked 18 Montana small meat processors permission to evaluate their plants and processing procedures so protocols could be developed to help meet USDA requirements. This would include providing information on slaughter days, inspector names, pounds of meat or number of animals harvested and interventions used.

Ten plants agreed to participate in the validation study. Sampling has been completed at three plants, and the others are in varying stages of the sampling process. One challenge of gathering information with smaller

plants has been that the flow of animals through the plant is variable, with only one or two processed in a week and a slowdown in processing during spring and early summer.

### Results/Impacts

Even with more data to collect, an overall recommendation sheet has been developed addressing common food safety protocols needed, including:

- Use an experienced or trained person to apply intervention
- Keep the time constant for washing and applying lactic acid
- Don't leave the lactic acid sprayer nozzle laying on the floor
- Watch for hair or manure on the carcass, especially in spring
- Carefully inspect each carcass for contaminants; don't depend on the inspector to find them

### Next Steps

Once the project is completed, each processor will have a written testing plan tailor-made for processes that will help achieve compliance with ever-changing regulations and support decisions made for food safety. Among materials being developed are:

- Microbial data to support the specific intervention used in the plant
- Temperature decline graphs for each plant, along with a cooler graph for the same time period, to help processors determine the effectiveness of their cooling regime
- Recommendations for dressing procedures and intervention application to reduce microbial survival



Project coordinator Jane Ann Boles.





## PACIFIC NORTHWEST SUBREGIONAL

More Americans, including our elected officials, could use a little soil under their nails, contends author Michael Ableman.

“Every member of Congress should be required to spend one day a year with hands-on food production,” said Ableman, a farmer and the keynote speaker at a banquet that launched the Western SARE Pacific Northwest Subregional Conference in Spokane.

Ableman’s ideas on ag education were echoed frequently over the next two days as nearly 100 invited producers and ag-support people mulled issues and ideas for sustaining agriculture in Idaho, Washington and Oregon. His dinner speech set the table for facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions that continued over the next two days.

“We brought in a nationally recognized speaker and author and invited the general public to the event, which expanded the public’s awareness of Western SARE and SARE in general,” said on-site conference coordinator Jeff Schahczenski, a program specialist with NCAT.

Schahczenski noted that one-third of attendees were



Poster discussions in Spokane.

ranchers and farmers, several of whom had been involved in Western SARE projects, but many were exposed to SARE for the first time, further expanding the conference’s educational reach. That was evident in the comments of producer Jessica McAleese of LadyBird Farm in eastern Idaho.

“I really valued the subregional conference and was completely energized when I returned home,” said McAleese. “We are now in our fourth season, and I still draw on the conference experience for insight.”

The Pacific Northwest Conference, at the Spokane Red Lion Hotel in February 2009, included a number of smaller producers like McAleese, but it also included producers in the middle and discussions that reflected a wide range of interests across the agricultural spectrum. Priorities included producer-to-producer learning through networking, tours and demonstrations and assessments of energy and nutrient cycling on a whole-farm basis. (See list of Priorities below left.)

While the issues that bubbled up from the discussions are critical to helping guide Western SARE in the Pacific Northwest, those attending the conference cited the discussions themselves and the interactions with like-minded people as an important conference outcome – truly “invigorating,” said one.

For Fred Berman of the Washington Department of Agriculture, the networking opportunity was the most memorable outcome of the conference.

In a survey conducted at the conference, one participant wrote, “This experience



Producer Janie Burns of Idaho.



Dan Sullivan of Oregon State University.



Michael Ableman

### Pacific Northwest Priorities

- Conduct on-farm trials, tours, demonstrations and farmer-to-farmer networking events highlighting sustainable agriculture
- Conduct sustainable system studies dealing with whole-farm energy and nutrient cycling
- Foster studies of local and regional foodshed development and implementation
- Research local and regional infrastructure development for agricultural processing (small- and medium-scale), cleaning, distributing, financing and consulting
- Develop partnerships with organizations serving underserved/disadvantaged communities related to Western SARE grants and outreach

**In brief...**

- February 28-30, 2009
- Spokane, Washington
- 90+ Attendees
  - ~ 33% Producers
  - ~ 10% Agencies
  - ~ 30% Educators
  - ~ 27% NGO and Agri-business
- 500+ individual comments recorded
- 25 posters on SARE grants
- On-site Coordinators:
  - ~ Jeff Schahczenski, Program Specialist, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Butte, MT
  - ~ Cinda Williams, Sustainable Ag Coordinator, University of Idaho, Moscow, and Western SARE Idaho State Coordinator
  - ~ Bonnie Bobb, Director, Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, Austin, NV
- AC Members Attending: Stacie Clary, CA; Sandy Halstead, WA; Mike Harrington, CO; Karl Koppers, WA; Dan Long, OR; Richard Parrott, ID; Peg Perreault, CO
- Area Covered: Oregon, Idaho and Washington

*from previous page*

was an excellent opportunity to share knowledge, energize the sustainable agriculture movement and plant the seeds of change.”

Wrote another, “The organization and implementation of tabletop discussions was outstanding – the best I’ve experienced.”

Some praised the conference process – “a balance of listening and participating” – as well as the facilitation of



Ariel Agenbroad, UI extension agent, left, and Lora Lea Mistry of the Quillisacut Cheese Co. near Rice WA.

the discussions, described as energetic, lively and challenging. But others expressed concern about an accurate reflection of the issues. “It was difficult to reduce good ideas to ‘sound bites’; lots was lost in translation.”

Overall, attendees appreciated the summary recaps of ideas, but wondered what will come of the information. “It’s hard to imagine how all of this information will be moved forward.”

Berman said that while he hasn’t applied for SARE funding, he has encouraged several stakeholders he works with to do so.

Likewise, Lynne Carpenter-Boggs, a researcher with Washington State University, said the conference increased her desire and attempts to get more producers to listen to inspiring voices.

“People need to hear more that change is possible,” said Carpenter-Boggs, “and it starts within.”

The conference featured 25 posters describing results of Western SARE-funded grants on a wide range of topics, including mixed crop-livestock farming systems, farm-to-school projects, marketing, farmers markets and potato management.

Poster presenter Dan Sullivan of Oregon State University said the main outcome of the conference for him was to learn about

SARE programs in a broader way, to get acquainted with SARE partners outside of his local group.

“I think SARE is a different kind of program,” said Sullivan. “It strives to be more responsive to clientele than most federal programs I have experienced.” That said, Sullivan would like to have seen greater representation in the conference planning group by practicing farmers.

McAleese confirmed that the conference helped develop her understanding of SARE’s role, noting that she implemented several strategies she learned about into her farm, including green manure cover crops, sales of summer squash and developing a relationship with a local charter school.

“I am still connected with many of the growers I met at the conference,” she said. “Together we are working on several projects to enhance the development of sustainable agriculture in Idaho.”



Fara Ann Brummer of Oregon.



Jessica McAleese of Idaho.



Producer Henning Sehmsdorf of Lopez Island and WSU researcher Lynne Carpenter-Boggs.





## PACIFIC NORTHWEST RESPONSE GRANT

- **Title:** Expanding Small-Scale Grain Production in Southwest Oregon
- **Priority Addressed:** On-farm trials; local infrastructure & foodshed
- **Coordinators:**
  - ~ Maud Powell, Small Farms Extension Agent, Oregon State University
  - ~ Shelly Elkovitch, Research Assistant, OSU Small Farms
- **Amount Funded:** \$24,040
- **Project Number:** SW09-703



Project wheat plots in southwest Oregon.



Project coordinator  
Maud Powell.

### Situation

The wheat production landscape in Oregon has changed dramatically over the past 80 years, from one where many growers harvested more than 40 different varieties on a million acres to one with large commercial operations now dominating production and exporting mainly to Pacific Rim countries.

In Southwest Oregon, where bakers outnumber wheat growers, artisan bakers are eager to purchase locally grown wheat to satisfy the rising demand for locally produced food.

This grant is designed to support both first-time and long-time grain growers interested in small-scale production in becoming more efficient and networking with one another.

### Actions

From January through October 2010, at a small farm, the project team held six classes covering equipment, production techniques, marketing networks and equipment-sharing cooperatives. The first class included a panel of bakers, brewers, a

chef and a flour mill representative discussing pricing, quality control, storage and potential obstacles. Subsequent classes were held on local farms during the growing season.

Three producers were contracted to grow field trials of heritage and modern varieties, which the Wheat Lab in Portland analyzed for protein, ash and lodging, graphing the data to show performance.

### Results/Impacts

To meet demand, class sizes were doubled with 126 people attending the six classes, including farmers, end users of grain and aspiring producers.

Calls continue from producers eager to grow grain for the first time. To meet their needs, the project team taught "Wheat 101" to 13 people in February 2011, covering the basics of starting a wheat enterprise. The Small Farms staff partnered with Ashland Co-op and The Rogue Initiative for a



Vital Economy to create panel discussions on locally produced grain.

Each class participant received a resource binder, which is also available on the web, at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/growing-grains-small-farm>.

### Farmer Adoption

The classes prompted seven producers to plan to grow grain for the first time in 2011. And four producers are expanding their grain operations and collaborating with others in an equipment-sharing group. Meetings are continuing to explore forming a limited liability corporation to reduce costs and share production equipment.

Another producer made enough contacts among class participants to start a custom field preparation and combining service. Media coverage has led to equipment donations. And yet another producer is planning to purchase a mill and will offer his farm as a central grain processing facility.

### The future

The small-plot variety trials, while valuable, will be expanded to trials on larger blocks that simulate field-scale production. Conducted over several seasons, such trials should provide a more accurate picture of varietal viability.

# CALIFORNIA SUBREGIONAL

In California, where agriculture is more vast and diverse than in any other state, assembling a thorough representation of agricultural interests can be a challenge.

Western SARE's California Subregional Conference, December 2009 at the Visalia Marriott Hotel, apparently met the challenge, according to comments from the nearly 80 people invited to attend.

"The attitude (at the conference) was very open and embracing of multiple types of agricultural production, and I really appreciated that," wrote one participant in a conference survey.

"This was a very nice opportunity to engage with many other interested parties and stakeholders," wrote another. "I definitely will be more involved in SARE activities from here on."

One respondent appreciated the transparency.

"Planning for the future of SARE by the people it serves is a wonderful opportunity. We are all taxpayers, and we do want to know how public funds are planned and spent."

The California conference planners said they would like to have seen even more diversity, but noted that diversity was greater than had been anticipated as was networking with out-of-state and agency personnel.

The Western SARE-sponsored conference elicited input from stakeholders on future pathways for sus-



Steve Balling of Del Monte responds to a query from the California group as Michael Dimock, left, of Roots of Change and John Teixeira, owner of Willow Creek Ranch, look on.

taining California agriculture, by engaging them in facilitated and recorded roundtable discussions.

Steve Temple, University of California agronomist who has conducted several seminal Western SARE research projects, called the process a "very important activity."

"It should have strong impact on agricultural experiment station directors, deans of agriculture and others," said Temple. "This would be a great place to involve more large-scale corporate ag interests and the financial sector as potential partners in expanding the money base of

Western SARE."

After two half days of discussion, during which more than

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## In brief...

- December 1-3, 2009
- Place: Visalia, California
- 80+ Attendees
  - ~ 25% Farmer and Rancher
  - ~ 15% Government Agency
  - ~ 35% Educator
  - ~ 25% NGO/Agribusiness
- 450+ individual recorded Comments
- 27 posters on SARE grants
- On site Coordinators:
  - ~ Lori Berger, Exec. Dir., California Specialty Crops Council, Visalia
  - ~ Morgan Doran, UC Extension Farm Advisor, Solano County, and Western SARE California State Coordinator
- AC Members Attending: Dennis Alexander, NM; Rob Hedberg, Washington DC; Cindy Lair, CO; Deb Young, CO; Stacie Clary, CA; Karl Kupers, WA, Larry Cundall, WY, Mike Harrington, CO
- Area Covered: California



Producer Rebecca Thistlethwaite.



Steve Temple, an agronomist with the University of California.



Larry Yee, retired extension advisor, at right. Below, Paul Muller of Full Belly Farms chats with Mary Kimball of Land-Based Learning.



## CALIFORNIA SUBREGIONAL

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450 individual comments were recorded, participants worked to narrow priorities, suggesting to the Western SARE Administrative Council that it needs to focus on local and regional issues like distribution, processing, facilities and storage.

Participants also urged SARE to facilitate whole-system and disciplinary research and education on ag input and energy issues, and to facilitate producer-to-producer education and networking that builds on Western SARE grants and outreach. (See the list of California Priorities below.)

Leah Smith of the Marin Agricultural Institute emphasized the importance of producer exchanges, noting that the conference enabled conversations about sustainable agriculture with people she might not otherwise have engaged.

"I think that this kind of cross-fertilization is really important," said Smith. "SARE includes

many different stakeholders and people who represent varying degrees of sustainability in their business."

Conference planner Lori Berger, executive director of the California Specialty Crops Council, said several attendees told her they were pleased to learn more about Western SARE and the scope of issues under the umbrella of sustainable agriculture.

John Teixeira, owner of Willow Creek Ranch in Firebaugh, offered outreach advice.

"Take time to visit small communities," he said. "Get some dirt on your shoes and see what's out there. We

(farmers) are always changing, which we must do to survive."

Sheep producer Judd Redden appreciated discussing issues with other producers, even with different operations.

"This type of conference is always beneficial as long as it is new material," said Redden. "However, it is never a good thing to reinvent the wheel when it only needs a little air."

To help educate participants about the SARE program, the conference featured 27 posters on the results of Western SARE-funded grants in California on a wide range of topics such as grass-fed beef, transition to organic, riparian grazing, direct marketing, sustainable vineyard management and conservation tillage.

Based on participant comments, both during and after, the conference achieved its intended objectives.

"I was really impressed with the teamwork and commitment to problem-solving," wrote one. "I feel the conference was extremely effective and am excited to see what comes out of it."

Pete Goodell, IPM advisor at the University of California Kearny Ag Center and a conference planner, agreed.

"This was a valuable networking experience with some of the most dedicated farmers and researchers in the West," said Goodell. "It's an honor to have been involved."



National SARE Director Rob Hedberg, left, and moderator Jerry DeWitt.



Leah Smith of the Marin Agricultural Institute.



Tim Pedrozo, a cheese maker from Orland.



University of California Ag Dean Dan Dooley makes a point.

### California Priorities

- Conduct local and regional feasibility studies addressing distribution, financial/economic conditions, barriers to foodsheds and land trusts, facilities and storage issues and processing opportunities
- Facilitate farmer-to-farmer education, networking and co-learning opportunities (e.g. field days, information exchange meetings, etc.) that build upon Western SARE grants and outreach
- Develop whole-system and interdisciplinary research and education approaches to water conservation, soil and crop nutrients, soil management, conservation, energy conservation, integrated natural resource management and life cycle analysis
- Partner with groups engaging underserved/disadvantaged communities that build on Western SARE grants and outreach
- Encourage youth education and participation in Western SARE sustainable agricultural projects

## CALIFORNIA RESPONSE GRANTS

*(Western SARE funded three grants from the California Subregional Conference. They are summarized briefly here in a format different from the other six response grants featured in this publication.)*



- **Title:** A San Joaquin Valley Quilt: Stitching Together a Region's Prosperity, Nutrition and Sustainability
- **Priority Addressed:** Facilitate farmer-to-farmer education, networking and co-learning opportunities
- **Coordinator:** Daniel O'Connell, Farmland Conservation Director, Sequoia Riverlands Trust, Visalia
- **Amount Funded:** \$14,935
- **Project Number:** SW10-801

While Fresno and Tulare counties consistently rank in the top three agriculturally productive counties in the nation, a disconnect exists between this productivity and food consumption, even as many consumers seek to relate more to their food and its producers.

The project proposes to invigorate linkages between consumer demand and pro-



ducer supply of local and sustainable agricultural products in the San Joaquin Valley by addressing issues that constrain progress and by providing a roadmap for action. Farmer-to-farmer networking and co-learning opportunities will educate and connect producers.

Among topics to be researched and discussed at workshops are distribution channels, marketing practices, regional foodshed definitions, value-added processing and sustainable and organic practices.

- **Title:** CRAFT
- **Priority Addressed:** Facilitate farmer-to-farmer education, networking and co-learning opportunities
- **Coordinator:** Mary Powell, High Sierra RC&D Council, Auburn
- **Amount Funded:** \$30,653
- **Project Number:** SW10-803

The Sierra CRAFT project covers the highly diversified Sierra agricultural region. Rapid population growth has increased land prices but also opened marketing opportunities. Meanwhile, children of aging producers are disinclined to farm and potential young farmers have limited access to land and capital.

This grant is bridging knowledge gaps through workshops and field days. A steering committee of six producers and three extension agents pinpointed critical issues; so far they've con-

ducted three field days and three workshops: beginning farmers, soils and marketing. A six-session Farm Business Planning class conducted in February and March 2011 taught 17 new and experienced producers.

To encourage farmer-to-farmer networking, the project team has developed a listserv and website at <http://ucanr.org/sites/placernevadasmallfarms/>.

- **Title:** Developing Regional Distribution Networks to Enhance Farmer Prosperity: Retail Value Chains
- **Priority Addressed:** Address distribution channels and economic challenges
- **Coordinator:** Gail Feenstra, UC Davis
- **Amount Funded:** \$24,906
- **Project Number:** FW10-801

This project is designed to help small, diverse family farms access retail markets in a way that allows them to retain their production values, like "environmentally sound" or "community-oriented," all along food distribution channels. The concept is known as a "value chain."

The project will expand a grant already in progress funded by USDA's National Institute for Food and Agriculture, which is exploring successful development of value chains in California, Oregon and Colorado.

The SARE funding expands the NIFA project to include a case study on retail buyers – in addition to food service and institutional buyers already being studied. This retail supply chain is connected to the Sacramento Natural Food Co-op, known for working with local growers using sustainable practices.



## ALASKA SUBREGIONAL



Alaska's agricultural output may be relatively small, but its importance should not be underestimated, especially in an isolated state increasingly concerned about the nutritional quality and security of its food. And despite Alaska's many natural resources in a wide range of ecosystems, ranchers and farmers there face challenges unlike those found elsewhere in SARE's Western Region.

That message was driven home by more than 120 participants at the Western SARE-sponsored Alaska Subregional Conference at the Fairbanks Princess Riverside Lodge in March 2010.

Given that Alaska producers are spread across the far reaches of this vast landscape, where geographic barriers and high travels costs limit interaction, it's no surprise that many attendees said that one of the most important features of the conference was a chance to connect in person.



Papa and Mama Murnier of North Pole listen to presentations in Fairbanks.

Alaska Conference planner Michele Hebert, Professor of Agriculture at the University of Alaska and SARE State Coordinator, acknowledged SARE for developing the venue for face-to-face listening sessions, noting that the "opportunities for sharing and listening

were outstanding."

One participant, in response to an onsite survey, said of the conference, "It broadened my understanding of the challenges in the state as well as the opportunities. I will take the information I've received back to my community and spread the word about SARE."

Another wrote, "Getting the ag community together allowed awesome networking and chances to explore ideas."

Bryce Wrigley, a producer from Delta Junction and a conference speaker, said the gathering gave him a better perspective of the issues statewide.

"I was especially interested to learn of the concerns in remote rural villages," Wrigley said.

The concerns and issues surfaced during two half days of facilitated roundtable discussions. Recorders captured the issues and concerns the participants raised in response to six key questions provided to them before the conference.

In all, more than 600 individual comments were logged. These were sorted and voted on the second day as a way to focus on what SARE might address through funded grants or changes in planning and policy.

At the top of the list was the need to facilitate communication and networking with remote, isolated producers. In



Heidi Rader works with the Tanana Chiefs Council.



AlexAnna Salmon of Igiugig.



Conference planner Michele Hebert is interviewed by a local TV station.

### Alaska Priorities

- Provide education and outreach to producers, public, youth and underserved food producers using workshops, classes, field days, tours and demonstration gardens on locally adapted cultivars and livestock for production and storage
- Facilitate face-to-face producer networking and educational opportunities that build upon sustainable agricultural principles and Western SARE goals and funded projects
- Develop soil improvement methods and technologies using local sources of potential nutrients for composting, including fish, vegetation and other sources
- Study and develop local alternative sources of energy for sustainable agricultural production, including solar heating, wind, hot water systems, bio-fuels and others

**In brief...**

- March 17-19, 2010
- Fairbanks, Alaska
- 120+ Attendees
- ~ 40% Farmer and Rancher
- ~ 25% Government Agency
- ~ 25% Educator
- ~ 10% NGO/ Agribusiness
- 600+ recorded comments
- 20 posters on SARE grants
- On site Coordinator: Michele Hebert, Coordinator, Office of Sustainability, University of Alaska, and Western SARE Alaska State Coordinator
- AC members attending: Bonnie Bobb, NV; Stacie Clary, CA; Larry Cundall, WY; Sandy Halstead, WA; Dan Long, OR; Rick Melnicoe, CA; Peg Perreault, CO
- Area Covered: Alaska

*from previous page*

addition, the Alaska conference participants cited a need to improve their oftentimes impoverished soils, especially with local nutrients, and to develop alternative forms of energy to help sustain agricultural production. (See list of Alaska Priorities at left.)

Heidi Rader, a University of Alaska extension agent who works with the Tanana Chiefs



Participants ponder issues in roundtable discussion.



Emily Garrity of Homer casts a ballot on priorities during the second day of the sub-regional conference.

Council – 37 tribes in an area the size of Texas – said that while she had already heard many of the topics covered at the conference, she found it useful for networking and improving the Western SARE Administrative Council’s awareness of Alaska natives’ needs for sustainable agriculture.

One of her concerns, however, is that many small growers do not fit SARE parameters because their operations are too small – garden size – to be considered as farms or ranches, and thus are not eligible for grant funds.

Illustrating the challenges many Alaska producers face, Tim Meyers said it would be difficult for him to team up with other farmers to exercise a Western SARE grant, given that the farm closest to his is 400 miles away. As with many other Alaska producers, Meyers relies on his own ingenuity, for example, recently completing a 40- by 40-foot underground room for storage of up to 200,000 pounds of crops in his Arctic climate.

To showcase the Western

SARE program and some of its funding results, the conference featured eight Alaska posters and 12 from other states that apply to Alaska agriculture. Alaska poster topics included fruit and berry trials, weed management, landscape restoration plants, no-till forage establishment and use of geese for weed control.

One survey respondent expressed appreciation for the posters and poster handouts, noting that getting research information back to the producer is a SARE weakness. The respondent also liked the conference.

“The state and local producers should follow this model to exchange information and produce cooperative industry goals.”

Rader agreed that the process Western SARE used for the listening session process is worth emulating.

“Every USDA agency should be using the same process to plan programs,” she said.

Wrigley said such conferences are helpful, but added that their cost must be balanced with the values derived.

One survey respondent clearly found value in the conference.

“This is the best conference I’ve attended. Everyone was passionate. Having a SARE representative at each discussion table was great. I felt like I was talking with someone that really cared about our concerns.”



James Kelly of Fort Yukon.



Delta Junction producer Bryce Wrigley.



## ALASKA RESPONSE GRANT



Project coordinator Jodie Anderson of the University of Alaska.

- **Title:** Building Alaska Garden Soils from the Ground Up: Local Soils Research and Demonstration Project
- **Priorities Addressed:** Education and outreach to producers; soil improvement methods and technologies
- **Coordinator:** Jodie Anderson, director, Alaska Community Horticulture Program
- **Amount Funded:** \$48,497
- **Project Number:** SW10-901

### Situation

Many Alaskans hunt and fish to save on the cost of meat, and they gather berries to save on the cost of fruit. For fresh vegetables, they typically rely on costly imports, their quality reduced from lengthy transport.

At the same time, many Alaska communities have expressed an interest in producing food, but they perceive that inadequate soils inhibit production.



Topsoil applied to a new gardening plot in one of Alaska's remote villages.



In Galena Jesslyn West, left, and Kameron Reitan gather potatoes in the garden of Jesslyn's grandmother, Freda Beasley, the photographer.

Most Alaska farmers confront related soil problems, including thin root zones, nutrient-poor soil low in organic matter and issues with permafrost. Indeed, despite the high cost of shipping, some producers import garden soil from the Lower 48 by barge, unaware that many soil components can be found locally.

This project is designed to encourage Alaskans to grow food in raised beds and to motivate and educate producers by teaching them how to build soils from local materials.

### Actions

The plan is to engage five local producers, each representing a distinct region (ecosystem) of Alaska. The sites are in Kotzebue, Galena, Minto, Naknek and Juneau. Each producer will build four raised beds filled with locally manufactured soils. Two beds will be fertilized with local organic nutrients and two with conventional fertilizer. The beds will be planted with potatoes as the indicator crop.

Producers surveyed their respective areas for potential soil components and nutrient sources, collecting mineral, organic and nutrient sources. A nutrient analysis will provide a soil-development recipe for each site.

For outreach, the project team will conduct two soil-building workshops, in Angoon

and Bethel. The workshops will be filmed and a video created, available on CD, the Internet (in focused segments on a site like YouTube) and delivered to agricultural professionals as a teaching tool. This technique will afford greater distribution to communities where budget limitations preclude face-to-face interaction.

### Results/Impacts

While this project is designed to show how local Alaska mineral and organic components can be used to enhance garden soil for various communities throughout Alaska, the information will be applicable to many areas in the Western Region.

Educating communities about creating and maintaining soil with local components establishes a sustainable source for gardening in the community, thereby enhancing local diets through affordable access to healthy foods and promoting preservation of the natural environment.

### Next Steps

The research team will provide producers with the recommended nutrient recipe for each raised bed and analyze soil samples and harvest data.

The producers will invite community members to visit the projects to highlight the project and teach about raised-beds.

## POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

At each subregional conference, conversation hummed and enthusiasm ran high, often verging on passion, as participants poured out ideas for sustaining Western agriculture.

But once the travel bags were unpacked and participants returned to the drumbeat of their daily lives – on the farm, on the ranch, at the office – did the conference buzz live on? Had they packed with them a new understanding of, and affinity for, sustainability and SARE?

Certainly, Western SARE had received what it sought through the subregional process, namely hundreds of ideas to help plan its strategy for the future. But was there equal fulfillment for the 700 or so guests invited to attend the conferences?

To gauge whether the conferences' educational outcomes had been achieved, Western SARE staff emailed post-conference surveys to those who had attended. The survey was broken into two parts, 1) questions for all participants – both producers and those in ag-support capacities – and 2) questions for the producers themselves, just over a third of those attending.

For producers, clearly the most important aspect of the conferences was the networking opportunities the conferences afforded. Eighty-two percent of producer respondents said the conference "increased networking with other producers."

This was true across the board, but was especially pronounced in subregions where the geographic and cost barriers of travel often inhibit face-to-face interaction with other producers, educators or agency personnel – namely Alaska, Hawaii and



Al Kurki, center in white shirt, Western SARE Professional Development Program assistant training coordinator, leads a tabletop discussion in Spokane.



Dennis Cash, Western SARE Coordinator for Montana.

U.S. islands in the Western Pacific.

While not initially intended as a conference outcome, networking was clearly valued by those attending.

Paul Reppun, a producer from the Big Island of Hawaii, said that he valued the opportunity to meet a wide variety of people thinking about sustainable agriculture, adding that many of the contacts "have been continued and are of value."

As a way to educate participants about SARE and agricultural sustainability, each conference featured panels composed of recognized figures in the subregion's agriculture, as well as presentations by conference moderator Jerry DeWitt and Western SARE Regional Coordinator Phil



Bob Bishop of Palau has used information from eight conference posters in his work.

Rasmussen. In addition, the conferences displayed posters on the results of SARE-funded projects in the subregion, anywhere from 17 to 27 posters at each conference, often with the project coordinator on hand to respond to queries during a poster session.

Asked whether the conference or information it provided helped them adopt one or more of the practices discussed or portrayed, 65% of producers said it did.

Bob Bishop, a producer from Palau, said he applied practices found in eight of the 20 posters displayed at the Pacific Subregional Conference in Guam.

Idaho farmer Jessica McAleese said she adopted several strategies learned at the conference into her growing model, including green manure cover crops and initiating a relationship with a local charter school.

Sixty-four percent said the information gathered helped them improve the physical environment on or near their operation, and 64% said the conference helped them improve their quality of life to some degree.

About half of those attending used the information gathered from the conference to diversify their operations in some way or add value to some aspect of the operation.

Richard Collins, an Arizona rancher, said he came away



Jim Dyer, co-planner for the Southwest and Mountain conferences.



Cinda Williams, Idaho SARE Coordinator and a PNW conference planner.

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## POST-CONFERENCE SURVEY

*continued on page 30*



Allan Sabaldica, Northern Mariana Islands SARE coordinator.



Jeff Schahczenksi, Pacific Northwest Conference planner.



Don Vargo, SARE coordinator for American Samoa.

from the conference thinking about direct marketing, and his son, who now runs the ranch, is trying that route with beef.

Asked whether the information prompted them to purchase fewer inputs, only 42% said it did, while 46% said information from the conference helped them improve their financial picture.

All surveyed participants were asked about the impacts of attending the conference on their own knowledge or views. In several instances, more than 9 in 10 reported positive impacts. For example, 98% said they gained new knowledge, 94% said they received new information and 94% reported that their awareness of the topics covered was increased.

Jacob Cowgill, a new farmer from Montana, recalled thinking “just how vast the world of sustainable agriculture is and the seemingly limitless creative solutions to particular issues.”

Indeed, 94% of participants said that as a result of attending the conference, they have aspirations to do more in sustainable agriculture, and 89% said they have been motivated to do something new or will take some kind of action based on what was learned.

Many survey respondents indicated that they had already shared what they learned with others – a total estimated at 5,000 people, according to survey responses. What’s more, they anticipated sharing information gleaned with 10,000 more people in coming years.

A participant in the Alaska conference said it “broadened my understanding of the challenges in the state as well as the opportunities,” adding, “I will take the information I’ve



Dennis Lamm, right, SARE coordinator for Colorado, helps with priority voting in Albuquerque at a conference he helped organize.

received back to my community and spread the word.”

Around two-thirds of conference attendees indicated in the survey that they had changed their attitudes or would change their behavior in some way, for example by modifying or changing their decision-making process.

Jeff Banks, an extension agent in central Utah, said the conference broadened the options he can discuss with producers who are looking to make changes in their operations.

Policies that affect agriculture and a desire to see changes in those policies were threads of conversation that ran through all of the subregional conferences. While SARE can affect change through funded grants, it cannot involve itself in agricultural policy. That distinction was pointed out with the caveat that those attending could get involved in pushing policy change. Indeed, 66% of survey respondents said they would push for changes in policy affecting agriculture.

Mike Ridenour, a farmer from Wyoming, said he has taken ideas from the conference to local legislators and Utah organic farmer Penny Trinca said she writes letters and emails to USDA and elected officials urging greater funding for SARE.

The survey also asked attendees whether they antici-

pated changes as a result of the conference having been held, and most expressed what might be called cautious optimism. For instance, asked whether the conference might influence changes in agriculture conditions, such as more specialty crops or more diversification, 78% said it would.

Seventy-nine percent anticipated changes in environmental conditions (improved soil or water quality, for example) as a result of the conference, and 72% expected to see changes in social conditions, such as more consumers buying directly from producers.

However, only 60% thought the conferences would have any impact on economic conditions, for example by increasing producer profits.

Several participants said they thought the conferences would have impacts beyond those on the participants themselves. Steve Temple, an agronomist with the University of California, said, “This was a very important activity that should have a strong impact on directors of agriculture experiment stations and deans of agriculture.”

Heidi Rader, an Alaska extension agent, said the conference model could have impacts beyond those just from Western SARE.

“Every USDA agency should be using the same process to plan programs,” she said.

## 'BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS'

The phrases conference participants used to describe Western SARE's subregional listening sessions ranged across the spectrum.

From "a huge success, way beyond my expectations," and "this is the best conference I've ever attended," to "it did not generate the benefit I had hoped for" and "I would have liked more participation from larger farms."

To measure conference quality and impacts, SARE asked participants their opinions in surveys during the conference as well as in surveys and email interviews after the conference. As a rule, comments were positive and constructive with few complaints or criticism. Here's a sampling of what participants had to say on several aspects of the conference.

### Overview

"I was really impressed with the teamwork and commitment to problem-solving."

"A very good conference. It stimulated a lot of thought, and I learned a lot."

"Such conferences are helpful; however the cost of doing them must be balanced



Deb Young, former Western SARE AC chair, speaks in Cheyenne as AC members, from left, Peg Perreault, Karl Kupers and Cindy Lair, look on.

by the value derived."

"This was a great use of time."

"This was the best conference I've ever attended."

"We didn't get anything out of the conference except to learn that SARE exists."

"My distrust of federal government has decreased. The individuals at this conference seemed to genuinely want to help."

"I was completely energized when I returned home. I still draw upon that (conference) experience for insight."

### Process

"This was a rare, open and diverse process."

"This is a great participatory

model for gathering and synthesizing stakeholder input."

"Extremely well organized."

"It is rare that we get a chance to talk to ag bureaucrats from the federal level and to find out that they are indeed human beings."

"Thank you for bringing real farmers to the table."

"I wish all government-funded departments that serve the agricultural community had this format to listen to the industry needs."

"By going to the people, you can get a more concise picture or idea of needs and interests."

"In a short three days, I was able to meet with and learn from more high-caliber trainers and other resource people than I was able to meet and learn from in the past five years."

"Every USDA agency should be using this process to plan programs."

### Speakers

"The panel was extremely useful to open dialogue for the networking session."

"Inspiring, down to earth."

"Excellent to hear from producers."

"Great perspectives on the



Ted Radovich, Hawaii SARE coordinator.



Jackson Phillip, SARE coordinator for the Federated States of Micronesia.



Bob Barber, SARE coordinator for Guam and a Pacific conference planner.



Morgan Doran, left, California SARE coordinator, discusses his poster with Bob Rutherford.

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# 'BEYOND MY EXPECTATIONS'

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challenges facing us and the opportunity for real change."

"Made me think of projects I would work on."

"Excellent summary, especially new vocabulary."

"Good review of how far we've come."

## Tabletop discussions

"The organization and implementation of tabletop discussions was outstanding. The best I've experienced."

"I like that everyone was able to give an opinion."

"Great facilitation throughout the day and table discussions."

"This exercise (the whole experience, really) was an excellent way to think out loud and get feedback and confirmation."

"The tabletop discussion was the best part of the conference."

"A lot of discussion and nuance of a complex problem or a proposed solution was not recorded – much of it was not captured and at times the meaning was lost in translation."

"The SARE staff did a good job of drilling down and synthesizing participants' comments to get at the core of the issues, concerns and opportunities."

"Tabletop discussion was a wonderful exchange of ideas and information. It is a good example of people from diverse backgrounds working together to achieve a common, worthwhile goal."

## Posters & Handouts

"Good cross-section of SARE projects in posters; handouts are great."

"Beautiful educational posters, but the poster session

was too short."

"Posters were very well done."

"These were great encapsulations of the projects, photos, methods, presentation of data, summary statements and recommended applications from farmers and ranchers."

"The poster session was awesome."

"The poster presentations improved my knowledge of these topics, and I incorporated several of the principles into my operation."

## Networking

"Valuable networking experience with some of the most dedicated farmers and researchers in the West."

"Excellent opportunity to collaborate with members from all sectors of industry."

"I love hearing from other farmers with their practical ideas."

"Networking was excellent but the time was too short."

"It was a great opportunity to connect with people I traditionally may not encounter, from other states or my own."

"Networking was the best



Participants at the Pacific conference review project posters.

part of the conference."

"I am still connected to many of the growers I met at the conference, and together we are working on several projects to enhance the development of sustainable ag."

## Follow-up

"I am excited to see what comes out of it."

"We really could build on the success of this conference by holding subregional conferences every few years. A new group of participants could then share the experience."

"Good to recap and see new ideas in summary, but it depends on what comes out of this."

"Hard to imagine that all of this information will be moved forward."

"I hope the grassroots principles forwarded in the tabletop answers are easily seen and implemented by the decision-makers overseeing the process."

"Brainstorming is a great method if suggestions are implemented."

"Need to see direct outcomes and actions to come out of the Western SARE Subregional Conference."

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Western Sustainable  
Agriculture, Research,  
and Education Program

www.westernsare.org

USDA United States Department of Agriculture  
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

SARE is funded by the National  
Institute for Food and Agriculture,  
USDA

Editor: Ron Daines  
Communications Consultant  
Western SARE



**WESTERN SARE**  
Sustainable Agriculture  
Research & Education

**Western SARE**  
Neil Rasmussen, Coordinator  
1400 N. 2nd Street, Corvallis, OR 97331  
503.755.3327  
nrasmussen@westernsare.org

**Professional Development Program**  
Morgan P. Davis  
1400 N. 2nd Street, Corvallis, OR 97331  
503.755.3327  
mpdavis@westernsare.org

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**COOPERATIVE ORGANIC MARKETING**

**Situation**  
With the recent advent of industrial organic agriculture, small organic farmers are being out-margined by large-scale organic producers. Unable to compete with the economies of scale that capitalized agriculture can achieve, smaller producers have trouble staying in business. Additionally, the rising costs of certification, advertising, promotion, and labeling add an extra financial burden. This development threatens both the future of small communities and the integrity of small-scale farming.

Margin Organic is an association of four of the organic producers and processors in Marin County, California. Our goal is to help ensure the survival of ranching and farming in our county and to protect the environment and the local landscape through education and the commercial promotion of the single regionally produced food.

We also want to promote organic in Marin County by doing outreach to the number of organic farms and assisting directly to farmers and ranchers who are interested in switching to organic products.

**Project Number:** PWD-0-017  
**Principal Investigators:** Warren Weber, Cate Strouse, Farms, Inc.  
Heidi Heiberg, Executive Director  
Margin Organic  
P.O. Box 962  
14100 Sycamore, CA 94966  
(415) 453-9567  
info@marginorganic.com  
www.marginorganic.com

**Farmer/Rancher Grant**  
**Title:** Margin Organic's Cooperative Marketing Program  
**Project Number:** PWD-0-017  
**Principal Investigators:** Warren Weber, Cate Strouse, Farms, Inc.  
Heidi Heiberg, Executive Director  
Margin Organic  
P.O. Box 962  
14100 Sycamore, CA 94966  
(415) 453-9567  
info@marginorganic.com  
www.marginorganic.com

**Objectives**  
Our goal is to help ensure the survival of ranching and farming in our county and to protect the environment and the local landscape through education and the commercial promotion of the single regionally produced food.

We also want to promote organic in Marin County by doing outreach to the number of organic farms and assisting directly to farmers and ranchers who are interested in switching to organic products.

**Actions**  
With this project, we encouraged and facilitated the purchase of locally produced organic food in schools, farmers markets, and small businesses. We built public awareness and understanding of the importance of supporting local sustainable agriculture by increasing media coverage, creating informative and attractive websites, hosting and attending seminars, and educating growers about organic products.

**Warren Weber, Inc. and Heidi Heiberg, Executive Director of Margin Organic, oversee the Marin County State Fair Farm-to-Fork event. Below, display booths are provided to both farmers and retailers.**

A handout describing a SARE-funded project in California.

# REACH OUT • LISTEN • RESPOND



WESTERN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION



SARE is funded by the National  
Institute for Food & Agriculture, USDA

