



WESTERN SARE SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE

~June 10-11, 2008 ~
Best Western Rio Grande Inn
Albuquerque, New Mexico



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SARE Draws Input from SW Ag Producers & Supporters



Jim Dyer



Jill Auburn



Jerry Dewitt

More than 100 farmers, ranchers and people who work for ag-support agencies in the Southwest United States joined Western SARE for the Southwest Subregional Conference in Albuquerque June 10-11.

The conference is the second in a series of grassroots meetings designed to portray to the Western agricultural community the useful information generated from 20 years of SARE grants to producers, researchers, educators and nonprofit organizations.

Equally important, the Western SARE team – staff, state SARE coordinators and Administrative Council – seeks to draw input from its constituency on priority needs and issues for the sustainability of Western agriculture during the next 20 years.

Jerry Dewitt, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, is serving as moderator for all six of Western SARE's subregional conferences.

"You have a voice and you have a vote, and with your help we're going to make the Western region better than it already is," said Dewitt.

Jim Dyer, a keynote speaker and director of the Southwest Marketing Network in Colorado, urged conference participants to speak their minds.

“If we’re not getting pushback or criticism,” said Dyer, “we may not be fulfilling our mission.”

Jill Auburn, National SARE director, echoed Dyer’s charge.

“We can pose the questions,” Auburn told participants, “but the answers are in the hearts and minds of creative thinkers out on the landscape.”



On the morning of the second day in Albuquerque, Dewitt made these observations about activities, participation and comments from the previous day:



- There was a good diversity of participants.
- The posters were well done.
- People wanted to listen to each other.
- The networking was excellent but the time for doing it was too short. “That means you were really working at it,” he said.

Many of the comments indicated that the conference was helping dispel participant distrust of government and confirming that conference sponsors genuinely want to help.

“You’ve told us that Western SARE is extremely important for agricultural sustainability, that it bridges the gap between government, extension and producers,” said Dewitt.

Participants also followed Dyer and Auburn’s entreaties. Recorders at eight tabletop discussions, on the first day, logged nearly 500 separate responses to six critical questions, which were then discussed and prioritized. Here’s a sampling of specific comments on top-rated issues that emerged under each question.

1. What will be needed to create stronger local food systems?

- Educate consumers how to buy, grow, cook and eat local and seasonal foods
- Encourage more animal processing options
- Publicize Western SARE and its programs to producers



- Urge greater community dialogue on subjects like carbon footprint, specialty crops and sustainable ag promotion
- Improve water quality and quantity

2. What are the local food production trends in your area? Do you think farmers will produce enough food for your area 10-15 years from now? What areas of production need improvement?



Among the trends cited are loss of farm land, lack of infrastructure and processing capacity, less crop diversity, fewer and larger farms, marketing consolidation more year-round production and the next generation leaving the farm. In general, attendees said farmers will be able to produce

enough food, but they raised these needs:

- Develop local processing and infrastructure
- Break down barriers and provide incentives to new farmers
- Teach about home grown food and individual food security
- Increase leadership training within farm groups
- Increase knowledge of crop variety options
- Assist with season extension techniques
- Protect water rights
- Improve efficiencies of all resources, especially water
- Develop cooperative production and marketing efforts



3. The SARE program was commissioned, by Congress, to get its research results to the farmer and rancher. Has this been a success in your area of influence? Why or why not?

- Researchers need to be more involved in outreach
- Harness new communications technologies, like podcasts and DVDs

- Add a youth education component to grants
- Send out more news releases to traditional media
- Target additional dollars for post-project promotion





4. What type of research, education and development will be necessary over the next 10 years to help economically sustain farming and the environment?

- Water conservation, quality, quantity, storage and efficiency
- On-farm energy and energy availability
- Increase research and education on whole-farm systems
- Add land ethics to college curricula
- More on farm for K-12
- Increase food safety and bio-security training



5. If Western SARE received (from Congress) an additional \$1 million per region, what types of

projects should be targeted or emphasized?

- More youth-based programs and education of kids and youth
- Research into energy alternatives, efficiencies and renewable energy
- More funding for marketing programs
- Education on the nutritional values of sustainably produced foods
- Explore Water use efficiency, quality and quantity



6. What barriers are in place that prevent underserved groups, including socially disadvantaged groups, from applying for and receiving SARE funding, and how can those barriers be removed?

- Knowledge about SARE
- Cultural issues
- Working-group model is an institutional barrier
- SARE needs inclusiveness and diversity training
- Internet/computer access or limitations
- Computer literacy
- Perceived prejudices on the part of grantors/applicants