



WESTERN SARE SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE

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



8-5-08

Western SARE Coordinator Lauds Values of Grassroots Approaches

By breaking down the vast Western region into subregions, and listening to the producers, educators and researchers within those regions, Western SARE will be more responsive to the needs of its constituents, said Phil Rasmussen, regional coordinator.



Phil Rasmussen, coordinator of Western SARE, hosted at Utah State.

“Western SARE has a wide range of climates and terrain,” Rasmussen told participants in Western SARE’s Southwest Subregional Conference June 10 and 11 in Albuquerque. “From the arctic to the tropics, from the central valley to the mountains, from the high plains to the desert Southwest.”

He said that the conferences, six in all, provide a sounding board for what’s needed in each subregion.

“You will be heard by Western SARE’s Administrative Council, many of whom are here today. They have already put down some dollars to solve some of the problems,” he said alluding to a \$50,000 RFA that evolved from the first subregional conference held in the Pacific in October 2007.

Rasmussen reminded participants that SARE effects change by awarding competitive grants. Indeed, the regional office has undertaken five years of intensive evaluation of the outcomes of the grants it has awarded during its first 20 years. Among the findings are that Western SARE needs to fund more systems-oriented projects and that it needs to fund projects for longer periods.

“It takes longer to get meaningful results, but if we can achieve that it will be a major change for our program,” he said.

Among changes the Western region has already made is a doubling of grant dollars for Farmer/Rancher and Professional + Producer grants.



And a change the entire SARE program is hoping to achieve is a bump in annual funding that clears the \$20 million mark (it’s currently just over \$19 million). Rasmussen noted that SARE’s governing legislation includes a trigger: When the program reaches \$20 million in funding, it automatically initiates the “federal-state matching grant program,” effectively doubling the program’s clout.

“We’re hoping we can get there in the next two years,” said Rasmussen.

Even with the region’s wide diversity of ecosystems, he told participants SARE is an equal opportunity granting program.

“Western SARE is here to serve the whole region, not just one state or subregion,” said Rasmussen, adding, “We’re trying to do a better job of serving the underserved.”