



## WESTERN SARE SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE

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



8-5-08



Jim Dyer,  
director of the  
Southwest  
Marketing  
Network based  
in southwest  
Colorado

## Dyer Encourages Conference Attendees to Speak Their Minds

Jim Dyer urged conference participants to give SARE staff and administrators their best shot during the Southwest Subregional Conference in Albuquerque.

“If we’re not getting pushback or criticism, we may not be fulfilling our mission,” said Dyer, director of the Southwest Marketing Network in Colorado and a former chair of the Western SARE Administrative Council.

He offered additional challenges for conference participants to consider, including charting the appropriate channels for dispersing information about SARE and sustainability and figuring out how to serve the needs of underserved audiences.

Dyer noted that information dispersal typically uses traditional techniques, including through peer producers, websites, site visits and conferences. But he asked: How do we get our information to the early adopters of new techniques and ideas, who then serve as examples for others? These must be real people, he observed, who can provide tangible models.

As energy prices rise, he asked, will it continue to be feasible to communicate through site visits and conferences? Should SARE consider the cost of travel in getting information to producers?



And if the Internet and other electronic methods of communication are engaged, what about people who cannot or will not use the Internet?

This latter point touches on the barriers of reaching underserved audiences.

“How can we build capacity to plan and implement successful projects,” he asked, “and does reliance on the Internet hinder participation?” It’s important to figure out how to build some level of ownership in SARE by the socially and economically underserved groups, said Dyer.

He said it’s also important to craft strategies for dealing with energy challenges, finding answers to questions about dealing with climate change and making sure we’re using energy for the right purposes.

“To deal with climate change, we need producer involvement, and a systemwide look will be needed,” he said.

Dyer also cited several accomplishments he’s observed in his long engagement with Western SARE and sustainable agriculture:

- We’ve produced a multitude of diverse projects.
- We’ve empowered producers and elevated their status.
- We’ve legitimized sustainable agriculture.

- We've provide a safe place for looking at new ideas – "No new idea is too far out there," he said.

Dyer recommended that when talking about stronger "local food systems" conversations should invoke the phrase "local and regional food systems" to avoid getting hung up on how many miles it takes to define local.

Also, he said, the discussion surrounding sustainable agriculture needs to expand to sustainable marketing, sustainable processing and sustainable packaging, issues encompassing the entire process of getting food from the farm to the table.