



WESTERN SARE SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE

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Bustos Sees SARE as Key to the Future of Western Agriculture



Don Bustos, organic producer and Western SARE Administrative Council member from Espanola, New Mexico.

Don Bustos, a New Mexico organic farmer and member of the Western SARE Administrative Council, finds hope in grassroots programs like SARE.

“We have been struggling for years and years, and it seems like there’s a light at the end of the tunnel, and how we get to that light depends on programs like SARE,” Bustos told participants during the Western SARE Southwest Subregional Conference

June 10 and 11 in Albuquerque. He observed that programs like SARE mentor farmers and ranchers and encourage and teach them how to take successful programs to others.

Bustos said it is critical to break down the vast Western region, with its huge diversity of bio-regions, to focus on subregions in conferences like the one in Albuquerque.

“We receive 12 inches of rain where I live (in northern New Mexico). That’s much different from climates in Washington or Montana, so we have to look at regional issues,” he said. “There is no cookie cutter silver bullet for all situations.”

Indeed, he said, places like New Mexico, and especially northern New Mexico, are further hampered with one of the lowest per capita earnings levels in the United States, which often precludes capital investment in agriculture.

However, he said, “We are fortunate in New Mexico in that we know how to grow sustainably, and we have the acequia (irrigation) system, the first democratic water system in the United States,” he said.

Bustos sees a critical need to increase local food production and consumption. As an example of the potential impacts, he said that elevating local food production and consumption by just 10% in the five-county area of northern New Mexico could improve farm income by as much as \$200 million.

Bustos listed other priorities that need attention, including infrastructure, processing, season extension, year-round production, farmer education, consumer education, policy development and grassroots organizing.

About the latter, he said, “I always say that we have to go back to the ground where it starts from. We need to work from the ground up.”

As for research priorities, Bustos listed added-value practices, new crop development and alternative energy.

And if SARE were to receive a boost in funding, he recommends spending it on youth development and outreach as well as “more intentional work with socially disadvantaged and marginalized communities.” For these groups, he said, it’s important for them to:

- Become informed about funding sources
- Understand the grant process
- Have the time to apply for grants
- Have the background and experience to apply

