



WESTERN SARE SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL CONFERENCE

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



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Jill Auburn,
director of the
National
SARE
Program.



Auburn Explains How SARE Has Broken the Grant-Funding Mold

The SARE program, whose funding capacity has grown nearly fivefold in its first 20 years, has succeeded by conducting “business not as usual.”

“We broke the mold in how grants are administered,” said Jill Auburn, national director of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. “We insisted that farmers and ranchers be involved with scientists and agribusiness in running the grants program, a core value that continues today.”

Auburn, the kickoff speaker at the Southwest Subregional Conference of SARE's Western Region, held June 10 and 11 in Albuquerque, cited evidence of SARE's distinctive approach: When the program was launched in 1988, SARE's budget of \$3.9 million funded 50 research projects. In 2008, more than 200 projects were funded with a SARE budget of \$19 million.

Sharing successes of SARE's first 20 years, Auburn cited development in 1990 of an outreach arm that shares information about SARE grant successes in published books and bulletins. She said recent research shows that two-thirds of farmers and ranchers who read SARE's publications are inspired to do something new on their operations.



In 1994, SARE developed the Professional Development Program (Auburn was the first PDP coordinator in the Western region while at the University of California Davis). This step, she said, recognized the importance of extension in taking information to farmers and ranchers to put on the ground.

The concept of sustainability is seeping into the U.S. farm landscape, and Auburn cited this evidence:

- 4,000 farmers markets
- 1,000 community supported agriculture operations
- quadrupling of organic production in the last decade, with an annual growth of 20% a year
- the Food Alliance now certifies 5 million acres
- sustainability is peppered throughout the farm bill

“This program and its principles are being embraced by USDA at all levels, and sustainability is woven throughout agriculture,” said Auburn. “Sustainability is smack in the middle of the national conversation.”

More important is what happens in the next 20 years – “That’s why you’re here,” Auburn told conference participants. SARE’s goal is to truly advance sustainability to the whole of American agriculture. To that end, she said there is a need for more widespread implementation of:

- diverse rotations
- managed grazing
- ecologically based pest management
- marketing and value-added.

In addition, there will be a need for new information and knowledge on:

- food, feed, fiber and fuel
- links between sustainable food systems and food and nutrition
- a uniting of producers and consumers, and the markets in between, in the food chain
- new knowledge that may not even be on our radar

“We need to embrace major players,” said Auburn. “We need changes in policy at federal, state and local levels. And we need a new generation of leaders, many of whom may come from the many universities who are starting curricula in sustainable agriculture.”