



Setting the Priorities

Hawaii Subregional Conference Participants Identify Isle Agriculture Needs and Issues

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The following is a draft list of the highest priorities among the hundreds of needs, issues and approaches identified by Hawaii subregional conference participants on the first day of the event. This focused list served as the basis for discussion and reports from the tabletop groups on the second day.

The issues and needs are clustered under each of six key questions posed at the conference. The Western SARE Administrative Council will examine these and many other intriguing ideas presented, and a broad list will be posted later on this website.

Based on participant comments at the Hawaii conference, three resounding issues or topics were among the many priorities that emerged – 1) land and water access and affordability for agriculture; 2) reducing imported inputs (feed, fertilizer, and fuel); and 3) youth and consumer education in sustainable ag and food systems.

I. What will be needed to create stronger local food systems that are less reliant on imports from elsewhere?

- 1) Keeping land in food production; and keeping agricultural lands affordable, using tools such as reasonable lease rates, long leases (at least 5 years) and zoning that is more supportive of agriculture and farm worker housing.
- 2) Improved access to affordable water for agricultural uses.
- 3) K-12 hands-on education and mentoring on the benefits of growing one's own food and agriculture
- 4) Consumer education on the health and environmental benefits of consuming locally grown food as well as weekly food purchases that benefit the local economy.
- 5) A new will and commitment on the part of state and local leaders to support Hawaii agriculture through state policy. This includes initiatives like local governments and schools buying local foods (local food purchasing preference programs) and placing higher priority on farmers' needs for affordable land and water rather than non-farm development.

II) What are the local food production trends in your area? Do you think your local farmers will produce enough food for your area 5-10 years from now? What areas of production need improvement?

Conference participants identified several trends that were running counter to each other in Hawaii. First, factors negatively affecting sustainability:

- 1) Declining domestic animal agriculture production – beef, pork, dairy and poultry.
- 2) Aging farmer population and fewer farmers statewide.
- 3) Landowners are not dedicated to the importance of accessible agriculture lands.
- 4) Increased foreign competition on what once were crops raised exclusively in Hawaii.

The trends that can lend to sustainability:

- 5) Increased consumer interest in locally grown and Island-fresh foods as well as organic foods and grass-fed beef.
- 6) Increase in the number of farmers markets and the number of consumers shopping at these venues.
- 7) Chefs and stores are buying far more local produce than in the past. Demand is outstripping supply in some cases at this time.

III) 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?

What SARE has done well:

- 1) High profile grant recipients in Hawaii share information.
- 2) Some grants go to farmers who are the most innovative. These grants reduce producers' risk in trying something new.
- 3) SARE has a good website and materials

There was also praise for certain SARE-funded Hawaii research projects, the UH CTAHR sustainable and organic ag website (funded in part by SARE) and the graduate student program.

What SARE could improve:

- 4) Change farmer grant reimbursement to 1/3, 1/3, 1/3.
- 5) Need better connection between what research is done and what farmers need.
- 6) Better networking between research, extension and farmers.
- 7) Better communication and outreach because so many are unaware of SARE and the results of what it funds.

Followed by: Farmer grant funds need to be increased for implementation, and SARE needs to evaluate which of its grant-funded projects' results made it into the mainstream and are well-known.

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

- 1) Reduce imported farm inputs – grow your own fertilizer, local resources for fertilizer, grow your animal feed. Reduce fuel costs.
- 2) More collaborative projects to develop whole farm systems such as integrated crop and livestock systems.
- 3) Plant breeding for local seed crops production, pest resistance, import substitution and increased yields.
- 4) Research on bees and other pollinators, including controlling varroa mites in bees. Followed by: marketing; Integrated Pest Management; local and renewable energy sources; consumer education on traditional Hawaiian food production systems and how people can use those foods.

V) If Western SARE received (from Congress) an additional \$1 million per region, what types of projects should be targeted or emphasized?

- 1) A bundle of approaches for K-12 education about food and sustainable agriculture (SA), such as sub-grants to teachers to add SA in the classroom, school gardens and consuming local foods in cafeterias.
 - 2) Support farming systems research such as integrating livestock into crop production and integrating off-shore and on-shore aquaculture into cropping systems.
 - 3) Create a public relations initiative (Hawaii Agriculture Authority) that showcases the importance of agriculture, makes farming a noble profession and changes current public perceptions of Hawaii food and agriculture.
 - 4) Set up a sustainable tropical ag demonstration farm (perhaps a community-based sustainability project) that highlights cost-effective, realistic approaches for Hawaii farmers.
 - 5) Educate legislators about sustainable agriculture.
- Other highly ranked topics were informational database for new farmers and fund more farmer/rancher grants.

VI) 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?

- 1) Far and away the highest priority: Have SARE publications in non-English languages – Laotian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Spanish, for example.
- 2) Distant second – More money for Western SARE.
- 3) Incentives (such as extra points) for grant-writers (extension researchers, etc.) who aim to serve minority groups.
- 4) Recruit and support individuals and organizations that are part of these underserved groups to spread the word about SARE and provide assistance in grant writing. Many forms of assistance were listed.