



Leopold Center Director Jerry Dewitt

Conference Moderator Lists Challenges on the Horizon for U.S. Agriculture



Moderator Jerry Dewitt

The people working to sustain America's agriculture have learned much in the last 20 years, but the next 20 will bring new challenges to the agricultural table.

So said Jerry Dewitt, moderator of a conference on sustaining Hawaii agriculture, sponsored by the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program (SARE) Sept. 23-24 in Kona.

Dewitt, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, and a longtime advocate of the movement to sustain agriculture, offered a look at what he sees on the horizon that SARE and all of agriculture must prepare for:

- **On-farm energy use and conservation.** The face of agriculture will change because of energy, and agriculture will have to redesign its thinking. No matter what size or location the operation, energy use and conservation will bring changes.
- **Marketing.** Agricultural producers will need to be more creative and find new ways to market their goods.
- **Local food systems.** A powerful driving force will be the relationship between food and health. What we grow and how we grow it will change agriculture, and consumers will speak with a loud voice.
- **Family farm profitability.** We need to preserve, honor and value the heritage of family farms, with a goal of putting more men and women on the farm.

- **Value-added agriculture.** Instead of allowing value to accumulate out of state or out of county, farmers need add their own value to what they produce.
- **Multi-functionality of agriculture.** We must look beyond food and fiber to other values agriculture provides, such as preserving soil, providing aesthetic values and stabilizing communities.

Dewitt put these challenges in context by listing what SARE has learned in its first 20 years:

- SARE has learned that farmers' ideas are important.
- It has learned that farmers are teachers – not all the answers reside at the land grant universities.
- Farmers can make a difference.
- Farmers have a voice and a vote at the table, but we must bring new voices to the table.
- Alternative and organic agriculture have been embraced, but both can be done better, and farmers in Hawaii and the Pacific are ahead of the curve.
- We've acknowledged the value of on-farm research.

Dewitt encouraged the 100-plus conference participants to express what they want from SARE.

"Where do we need to go with SARE in the next 20 years? What do we need to do and what do we need to quit doing? How can we at the Western Region SARE better serve and respond to you? We promise to listen," said Dewitt. "The journey of the next 20 years begins today."

For more information on the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, visit www.leopold.iastate.edu.