



## **Mountain & High Plains Subregional Conference Issues and Action Summary**

*Compiled by Al Kurki, Western SARE Assistant PDP Training Coordinator*

Following are the highest priorities from among the hundreds of needs, issues and approaches identified by participants on the first day of the Mountain and High Plains Subregional Conference Oct. 28-29 in Cheyenne. This focused list served as the basis for tabletop discussions and reports on the second day.

The priorities are clustered under each of six key questions posed at the subregional conference. The Western SARE Administrative Council will examine these and other intriguing ideas presented at the conference. A full list will be posted later on this website.

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

- 1) Regional livestock processing plants and infrastructure or mobile facilities.
- 2) Education programs for consumers/producers/facility owners/investors/schools/chefs/food servers on the nutritional, economic, environmental and reduced transport benefits of locally/regionally produced food.
- 3) A distant third – Farmer- and consumer-friendly regulations (relief from burdensome regulations).
- 4) An even more distant fourth – Diversify crops.

### **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?**

- 1) Increased consumer preference in locally grown, organic foods and direct-marketed food. With that trend, there's been an increase in direct marketing by small vegetable and fruit growers.
- 2) The one negative trend – reduction in prime farmland acres.

- 3) Increased water conservation affecting crop selection.

Other trends included: No common denominator in this region because of scale, economic and population differences; more value added processing; more fast food (not slow) in people's lives.

### III) The SARE program was commissioned, by Congress, to get its research results to the farmer and rancher. What can Western SARE do to improve this process?

- 1) Better outreach to producers, extension agents and other ag professionals (more widely shared research results, hands-on workshops).
- 2) Require that projects share results with popular press (trade journals/ TV/billboards).
- 3) Have a presence at local meetings, professional meetings, county fairs and other ag group meetings.
- 4) Distant fourth (tie) – Onsite demonstrations by producers.
- 5) (tie) Improve relevance of research to large-scale/mainstream agriculture.

### 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) Longer term grants and systems research.
- 2) Better integration of local crop and livestock systems.
- 3) Research based on increasing the value of production and reducing the cost of production.
- 4) Research the gap (and ways of closing it) between food producers and consumers (processing, transportation, marketing).
- 5) Increase quantitative research and analysis of systems that are net energy positive and water efficient.

Followed by: Water quality and quantity research; environmental and nutritional characteristics of local food; renewable energy for farms and ranches.

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

- 1) Model farms demonstrating sustainable practices.
- 2) Energy balance projects that look at conventional versus integrated energy use in on-farm production systems.

- 3) (Distant third) Strengthen state PDP program (mini-grants) administered by state coordinators.
- 4) Spend it all on Farmer/Rancher Grants.

Other higher ranked suggestions were: Fund longer term systems projects and document impact of sustainable ag systems on global climate change.

## 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) (Tie) Provide funding to local entities to target locally-identified underserved audiences.
- 1) (Tie) Consider "agriculture in the middle" as a disadvantaged group.
- 2) (Tie) Target grant assistance and SARE introduction to underserved audiences.
- 3) (Tie) Hire or contract skilled individual who can build interest and capacity with underserved groups.
- 4) Requests for applications (RFAs), publications, communications and outreach in native languages of underserved groups.

## Parting Comment

It is worth noting that participants of this subregional conference pointed out the great disparity in the Great Plains and Great Basin states. For example, this subregion has high commodity production-low population areas that are far from major population centers within the subregion – Denver and Salt Lake City. As result, "locally grown food" needs to be thought of in far larger radii than those commonly discussed.