



California Subregional Conference Needs and Issues Summary

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What follows is a draft list of the highest priorities among the hundreds of needs, issues and approaches identified by the California subregional conference participants on December 2, 2009, the first day of the two-day event. This more focused list resulted from the Day 2 group discussions. The top priorities in rank order are clustered under each of the six key questions posed at the subregional conference.

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

- 1) Educate all affected agricultural groups by funding marketing/outreach and holistic approaches to the value of local/community food systems.
- 2) Feasibility studies and/or research of alternative/local food distribution channels; financial/economic aspects; facilities/storage issues; meat processing opportunities; land trusts and barriers.
- 3) Change incentives/remove barriers to increase support for local systems by policy research as a catalyst for change, showing the economic benefits of buying local/regional products.
- 4) Research projects on: infrastructure, distribution, comprehensive statewide needs assessment and optimal mix of scales to ensure viability of local food systems.
- 5) Facilities/distribution systems for producers – (mobile meat processing units that have vehicle washing, storage, auction yards, etc.).

II) What are the local and regional food production trends in your local area?

- 1) Higher demand for sustainable and organic food.
- 2) Higher demand for local and seasonal foods.

- 3) Land leaving food production or transitioning to higher value crops.
- 4) Consumers and growers do NOT value local.
- 5) Water issues becoming more acute.
- 6) Tie – Increased consumption of fruit, veggies, healthy food. Increase in local processing. Exponential increase in media interest in food.

III) The SARE program was commissioned, by Congress, to get its research results to the farmer and rancher. How can this process be improved?

- 1) Improve websites (better project search, keywords, search optimization, more user-friendly, subscribe to research updates, Google links, etc.).
- 2) Farmer-to-farmer education and co-learning opportunities (field days, information exchange meetings, etc.).
- 3) Use existing infrastructure and farmer interfacing groups (Farm Bureau, commodity boards, farmers markets) for communicating SARE info and opportunities.
- 4) Use more contemporary forms of electronic media (Facebook, Twitter, video, audio, YouTube, blogs and improved websites).
- 5) Encourage broader-based research focus (too much production oriented) – need more emphasis on demand side (marketing, financial management).
- 6) Greater funding for SARE.

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

- 1) Water: availability, policy, conservation, efficiency, crop-specific, low water use crops.
- 2) Social dimension projects: farm succession, beginning farmer/rancher and sweat equity.
- 3) Research about on-farm renewable energy opportunities, alternative fuels and carbon sequestration.
- 4) Entrepreneurship skills education, youth involvement/mentorship, how farmers can access capital at reasonable rates.
- 5) Systems approach to water conservation, nutrients and soil conservation, energy conservation, integrated natural resource management.

- 6) Tie – Plant breeding for sustainable production. Sustainable pest management systems and transition between approaches (e.g., farming without fumigants).

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

- 1) Longer term and larger grants for interdisciplinary systems research (whole systems, life cycle analysis, etc.).
- 2) Energy research, co-ops using solar panels to create carbon credit bank, alternative fuels, etc.
- 3) Enhance education for beginning farmers (including peer-to-peer and hard core incubator programs).
- 4) Research regarding a resilient food system, regional food security, victory gardens and rural systems.
- 5) Research of farming with shrinking water supplies, irrigation management, water quality.
- 6) Research and education on value-added products, agritourism, carbon credits, new markets/products.

VI) How can Western SARE overcome barriers that may prevent underserved groups, including socially disadvantaged groups, from applying for and receiving SARE funding?

- 1) Partner with local underserved organization and associations. Direct outreach to targeted community groups and leaders, United Farm Workers, churches.
- 2) SARE grant-writing workshops for underserved, have mentors available, real proposals, help research project material.
- 3) Calls for Proposals should be released that fund projects specifically targeted to underserved groups such as migrant labor.
- 4) Hire/engage/partner local leaders.
- 5) Identify underserved groups and their specific needs, then prioritize SARE projects by using focus groups.
- 6) Diversity within SARE, diversity represented on governing bodies and staff, reconfigure SARE, examine mission.