



Western SARE Program

Phil Rasmussen, Coordinator Utah State University Agricultural Science Building Room 305 4865 Old Main Hill Logan, Utah 84322-4865 phone: (435) 797-2257 fax: (435) 797-3344

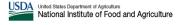
Western SARE PDP

Stephanie Walker
New Mexico PDP Coordinator
New Mexico State University
Extension Plant Sciences Dept
MSC 3AE, Box 30003
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003
(505) 646-4398
swalker@nmsu.edu

SARE Grant Categories

- Research & Education
- Professional Development
- Farmer/Rancher
- Professional + Producer
- Graduate Student
- Sustainable Farm Tours

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DRAWING ENERGY FROM THE SUN

Situation

The trend among many U.S. consumers to "eat fresh" and "eat local" has stimulated the popularity of farmers markets and community supported agriculture systems. Success in these markets has permitted many producers to center their work in these two ventures without turning to additional sources of profit.

However, cool weather during winter months prevents many farmers from producing. Not only do farmers suffer financial setbacks, consumers at farmers markets, CSAs, schools and other institutions lose access to healthful produce.

Santa Cruz Farm, which grows more than 70 different varieties of organic fruits and vegetables on its 3.5 acre

Farmer/Rancher Grant

Project Number: FW05-011 **Title:** Solar Energy for Year-Round Sustainable Production

Project Coordinator:

Don Bustos Santa Cruz Farm and Greenhouses P.O. Box 5045 Espanola, NM 87533 505.514.1662 santacruzfarm@windstream.net

Technical Advisor:

Del Jimenez Sustainable Agriculture Science Center at Alcalde New Mexico State University P.O. Box 159 Alcalde, NM 87511 505.852.4241

djimenez@nmsu.edu

Amount Funded: \$9,683



Bustos grows a variety of greens in his solar-heated greenhouses.

farm at 5,800 feet at Espanola, New Mexico, found it difficult to supply enough produce to its market during winter months to stay financially secure.

Objectives

With its Western SARE Farmer/Rancher grant, Santa Cruz Farm sought to:

- Increase the supply of organic vegetables during winter months using solar energy
- Share results with the agricultural industry through presenting its solar energy system as a potential model, by conducting tours and workshops

Actions

The solar energy system implemented at Santa Cruz Farm and Greenhouses is a root-zone thermal heating system consisting of:



Don Bustos of Espanola, NM

- Five solar panels 5 feet by 8 feet
- A 750-gallon underground water storage
- Copper and plastic tubing for closed-loop circulating systems
- Pumps and gauges needed for circulation the fluids

SARE Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

SARE's mission is to advance—to the whole of American agriculture—innovations that improve profitability, stewardship, and quality of life by investing in groundbreaking research and education.

The Western Region, one of four SARE regions nationwide, is administered through Utah State University.

Western SARE: http://wsare.usu.edu

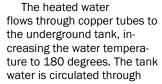
National SARE www.sare.org

DRAWING ENERGY FROM THE SUN



The greenhouse under contstruction.

Here's how the system works: The sun heats a water/glycol solution to 190-210 degrees. Glycol is the system's antifreeze, keeping water from freezing in winter or turning to steam in summer. A two-loop closed system prevents the possibility of glycol leaking and polluting the soil.





In addition to greens, the farm produces more than 70 varieties of crops.

plastic tubing running underneath the greenhouses in raised beds, increasing rootzone temperatures to 48-52 degrees through the winter,



A tour group visits the solar facilities and greenhouse.

even when temperatures outdoors are below freezing.

This greenhouse atmosphere is enhanced with two insulating sources:

- A cold frame structure that shelters plants from wind and cold night temperatures
- A polyester blanket covering plants at night to direct warmth near the soil surface

Results

The system requires only a minimal amount of electricity to circulate the water/glycol through the system.

During the first winter of use in 2005-06, the system cut the cost of fossil fuels previously used to heat the greenhouse from \$1,900-2,000 a year to zero. Results were the same in 2006-07.

Yields from greenhouse crops increased 30-40% in 2005-06. Yields were even more abundant in 2006-07.

Potential Benefits

The system allows producers to enhance plant diversity. For example, the solar system has allowed Santa Cruz Farm and Greenhouses to add cooking herbs to the farm's current mix of 72 plant species.

The increase in plant yields using solar energy raises earnings for producers while at the same time reducing the amount of fossil fuels required to run greenhouses and transfer food to selling destinations.

Hundreds of guests and producers have toured the greenhouses, and several have expressed interest in using the Santa Cruz Farm and Greenhouses model to build their own solar heating systems.

In addition, Bustos has received inquires from across the United States.