

# Simply Sustainable

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from Western SARE  
working to sustain western agriculture

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## PRODUCERS SPEAK, SARE LISTENS

When farmers and ranchers in the Western region speak, Western SARE listens.

The Administrative Council and staff have heard that while each of the West's subregions has its own distinctive needs and interests, several threads run through all of the subregions:

- Producers need help with marketing
- Youth need to be engaged in and educated about agriculture
- SARE needs to do a better job of getting research results in the hands of producers
- Infrastructure, especially for small producers, is sorely lacking

The sounding board for these comments is a series of six subregional conferences Western SARE is conducting



Jerry Dewitt is moderating all six subregional conferences.

as listening sessions around the region. It has now reached the midpoint, with Pacific, Southwest and Hawaii in the rearview mirror and High Plains, Pacific Northwest and California in the headlights.

The Western region has also learned that participants are not shy about expressing their thoughts, including constructive criticism of the

SARE program, and that they clearly appreciate the opportunity to learn more about SARE and to offer their input for the future of SARE and agricultural sustainability.

In response to the conferences so far, the Western SARE Administrative Council has released Requests for Applications for conference participants in each subregion to apply for up to \$50,000 to pursue research and education in an area of need that evolved from the conference.

For an overview of the subregional conferences, including posters, handouts, keynote presentations and more detailed listings of the needs and issues, expressed in response to six "burning questions" (listed below), visit the Western SARE website, <http://wsare.usu.edu> and click on 'conferences.'

## PONDERING SIX BURNING QUESTIONS

To give Western SARE's six subregional conferences structure and continuity, six "burning questions" have been formulated for discussion and response by all conference participants.

The questions have been tweaked slightly since the first conference a year ago in the Pacific subregion, but their structure remains the essentially same:

1. What will be needed to create stronger local and regional food systems

that are less reliant on imports from elsewhere?

2. What are the local and regional food production trends in your local area?
3. The SARE program was commissioned, by Congress, to get its research results to the farmer and rancher. Why has this been a success or failure in your specific subregion?
4. What type of research, education and development projects will be necessary over the

next 10 years to help economically sustain farming and the environment?

5. If Western SARE received (from Congress) an additional \$1 million per region, what types of projects should be targeted or emphasized?
6. What barriers prevent underserved groups, including socially disadvantaged groups, from applying for and receiving SARE funding?

## SOUTHWEST SUBREGIONAL MEET

When the dust settled, participants in the Southwest subregional conference had offered, and Western SARE had captured, nearly 500 individual responses during tabletop listening sessions.

More than 100 farmers, ranchers and people who work for ag-support agencies in the Southwest United States joined Western SARE for the conference in Albuquerque June 10-11.

The conference was the second in a series of grassroots meetings designed to portray to the Western agricultural community the



Don Bustos

useful information generated from 20 years of SARE grants to producers, researchers, educators and nonprofit organizations.

Equally important, the Western SARE team – staff, state SARE coordinators and Administrative Council – seeks to draw input from its constituency on priority needs and issues for the sustainability of Western agriculture during the next 20 years.

Jerry Dewitt, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, is serving as moderator for all six of Western SARE’s subregional conferences.

Jim Dyer, a keynote speaker and director of the Southwest



Jim Dyer

Marketing Network in Colorado, urged conference participants to speak their minds.

“If we’re not getting pushback or criticism,” said Dyer, “we may not be fulfilling our mission.”

Jill Auburn, National SARE director, echoed Dyer’s charge.

“We can pose the questions,” Auburn told participants, “but the answers are in the hearts and minds of creative thinkers out on the landscape.”

Don Bustos, a New Mexico organic farmer and member of the Western SARE Administrative Council, said that he finds hope in grassroots programs like SARE.

“We have been struggling for years and years, and it seems like there’s a light at the end of the tunnel, and how we get to that light depends on programs



Jill Auburn

like SARE,”

On the morning of the second day in Albuquerque, Dewitt observed that there was a good diversity of participants and that people wanted to hear what each other had to say. The networking was excellent but the time for doing it was too short. “That means you were really working at it,” he said.

Many of the comments indicated that the conference was helping dispel participant distrust of government and confirming that conference sponsors genuinely want to help.

“You’ve told us that Western SARE is extremely important for agricultural sustainability, that it bridges the gap between government, extension and producers,” said Dewitt.



New Mexico SARE coordinator Stephanie Walker lends an ear.

*“We can pose the questions, but the answers are in the hearts and minds of creative thinkers out on the landscape.”*

*- Jill Auburn  
Director,  
National SARE*



Torres



Campos



Trujillo



Kretsinger



Costanza



Valliant



Casida



McGiffen

## HERE'S WHAT SW PARTICIPANTS SAID

The 470 individual comments recorded in Albuquerque were captured during eight tabletop discussions. In summary, a delegate from each table made an oral presentation to the Western SARE Administrative Council.

Cindy Torres, Colorado, emphasized the importance of educating consumers about benefits that come from sustainable agriculture practices beyond the values of better tasting, more nutritious food – clean air, clean water, more open space and other values that flow from sustainable ag.

She acknowledged the need to better serve socially and economically underserved communities that haven't previously been engaged. And she added that money should be set aside specifically for youth projects in sustainable agricultural practices.

Margaret Campos, New Mexico, emphasized the importance of having processing facilities for agriculture at the local level, notably animal and milling processing facilities. She said producers are not in an economic position to be able to foster such facilities, so it is incumbent on government to outline public policy that accommodates and encourages them.

Noting that most farm equipment is designed for large-scale production, Campos said she'd like to see more research into local small-scale food production systems.

Harold Trujillo, Colorado, expressed concern over water quality and availability. He suggested more exploration of drip irrigation and on-farm storage techniques.

Toward the goal of assisting small, local producers, Trujillo urged efforts to support cooperatives that could help overcome the high cost of equipment, and he urged research into "smaller equipment that fits smaller operations."

Trudi Kretsinger, Colorado, said there's a need for public policy that truly supports sustainable agriculture.

"It's often impossible for small producers to start up because of the prohibitive costs and the ocean of regulations," said Kretsinger.

On a personal note, she valued the experience of learning more about Western SARE and providing suggestions about needs and issues:

"I've been feeling a greater distance between us in the country and people in the city," she said. "It feels like the separation is growing, but this kind of meeting is helping to bridge the gap."

Ed Costanza, New Mexico, said a major concern is the shrinking number of farmers as many migrate off the farm.

"Our parents told us to leave the farm, get an education and get a good job," he said. "This has left a void in agriculture. We've lost our farms and we've lost our land as land and water rights have been sold off."

He added that many small farmers are losing their markets as grocers look for larger suppliers who can fill their needs for both quality and quantity, although he said some of these trends are being reversed with projects like Farm to Table and the rise of incubator kitchens.

Jim Valliant, Colorado, said that processing and marketing

need to be developed in concert. "The one thing we can do is produce many crops, but often we can't market them."

He also urged SARE to look at youth development – "We've got to encourage our youth to come back to the farm," he said.

Valliant said SARE grants should be afforded a longer period for completion to enable more thorough research results to be developed, and producers hampered by disadvantages in language or technology should be provided with grant-writing assistance.

Tisha Casida, Colorado, urged a review of the supply chain from field to fork.

"We need help improving the efficiency throughout the entire process," she said, adding that pennies can add up quickly if you're monitoring this all year long."

Casida added that SARE money would be well spent in post-project information dissemination, especially using new technologies and new media, like online information podcasting, an important venue for youth.

Milt McGiffen, California, advised that attention be paid to creeping urbanization on agricultural lands. Urban encroachment, he said, makes it more difficult to farm and creates problems for water quality and quantity.

Youth education is another critical area, and McGiffen suggested encouraging vocational agriculture teachers to put sustainable agriculture into their curricula.

"More and more of our population is moving away from the farm, and they don't know much about where their food comes from," he said.

*"I've been feeling a greater distance between us in the country and people in the city. It feels like the separation is growing, but this kind of meeting is helping to bridge the gap."*

*- Trudi Kretsinger  
Colorado*

# CHALLENGES FOR HAWAII'S AG

When the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, CTAHR, recently embarked on a strategic planning process to develop core values, it arrived at these: diversified economy, sustainable environment, strong families and communities.

"We do well in the agricultural arena," said CTAHR Dean Andy Hashimoto. "But a real challenge is to get our faculty to work together to achieve this balance of economy, environment and family."

As an example, Hashimoto cited bio-energy. It's one thing to research the economics of bio-energy crops, but what will be the impacts on the environment and the community?

"If it brings in migrant labor, for example, what are the impacts on infrastructure and education?" he asked. "Finding this kind of balance is the core of sustainability."

Hashimoto described the balancing act during the Western SARE Hawaii Subregional Conference in Kona, attended by more than 100 Hawaii farmers, ranchers and ag-support personnel Sept. 23-24.

Jerry Dewitt, director of the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture in Ames, Iowa, and conference moderator, described the purpose of the conference as a listening session in which the input from attendees will determine what SARE should do in the next 20 years. "We



Sen. Russell Kokubun, top, and Rep. Clift Tsuji, participated in the two-day meet.



Dean Andy Hashimoto

promise to listen to you," he said. "This journey of the next 20 years begins today."

In SARE's first 20 years, Dewitt said, the USDA program has learned that farmers' ideas are important, that farmers are teachers, farmers can make a difference, on-farm research is valuable and farmers have a voice and a vote at the table, although new voices must be brought to that table.

Dewitt listed several challenges on the horizon for which SARE must be prepared:

- On-farm energy use and conservation – "The face of agriculture will change because of energy, and we have to redesign our thinking."
- Marketing – How will we be creative and find new ways to market?
- Local food systems – "One of the main forces driving agriculture is the relationship between food and health, what we grow and how we grow it."
- Family farms and profitability – "How do we preserve, honor and value the heritage of the family farm?"

Three keynote speakers offered their own perspectives on the challenges for sustaining Hawaii agriculture.

Richard Ha, Hamakua Springs Farm on the Big Island, emphasized the importance of energy not just for agriculture but for all in Hawaii.

"Everything for our lifestyle is based on energy," Ha

observed, urging the harnessing of all forms of energy, including sun, wind, ocean and geothermal. "At this point we can't afford to turn away any opportunity that comes before us." Ed Boteilho, Clover Leaf Dairy on the Big Island whose irrigation

water was cut off two years ago during an island earthquake, has learned the importance of water to Hawaii agriculture.

"Agriculture has not been our (state's) priority, but it has to be," said Boteilho.

"We're not going to be eating houses or people, we're going to be eating food, so we need to work with our legislators to be sure we have water."

Gary Maunakea-Forth, who runs the nonprofit Ma'o Farm on the Waianae Coast of Oahu, sees Hawaii's ag future in its youth.

"We grow organic food and young leaders. We co-produce food to eat and the culture in which food is produced," he said. "Waianae has the highest food insecurity in the state of Hawaii. How does a rural community be rural if it's not in agriculture?"

Big questions for the future, said Maunakea-Forth, are how do beginning farmers get land and how do you create an environment where young people want to farm?



Richard Haw



Ed Boteilho



Gary Maunakea-Forth

*"One of the main forces driving agriculture is the relationship between food and health, what we grow and how we grow it."*

*- Jerry Dewitt  
Leopold Center  
for Sustainable  
Agriculture*

## REPORTS FROM HAWAII PARTICIPANTS

The nearly 900 individual comments recorded during the first day's 11 tabletop discussions in Kona were refined the next morning during further roundtable discussions.

A delegate from each table then offered a report to the Western SARE Administrative Council. Here is a sampling of delegate observations:

Gerry Ross cited a need to educate a broad range of constituents about the importance of sustaining agriculture, including consumers, youth, legislators and farmers themselves. It's especially important, he said, to educate the next generation of farmers.

"We need to elevate agriculture to a noble and profitable status," said Ross. "Being a farmer is a noble profession."

Glen Teves emphasized the importance of land and water for Hawaii's future.

"Landowners in Hawaii are not committed to dedicating their land to agriculture," he said, suggesting this bit of leverage: "You don't get water unless you dedicate land to agriculture?"

Susan Matsushima, noting the many conference participants had never heard of SARE, urged SARE to do a better job of getting information to the grassroots producer level.

She also cited the need for improved relations in the



Susan Matsushima



Gerry Ross



Doug McClure

agricultural community.

"Farmers need to work together. If you're not going to work together, you're not going to survive." Matsushima also encouraged partnerships with the land-grant university, which needs to train more people to assist island farmers.

Claire Sullivan said public policy should promote both local production and local consumption. It should also emphasize the importance of family farms. She suggested that the definition of "family farm" could be broadened to encompass an entire community.

As a means of reaching underserved farmers and ranchers, Sullivan suggested providing "incentives to university and extension staff who collaborate with the underserved."

Rich von Wellsheim said more education and outreach can help government officials understand the importance of the local food supply.

He cited the need to

conduct research at the whole-farm level, instead of being narrowly focused, and on using local inputs for fertilizer.

"We have a huge amount of biomass," said von Wellsheim, "yet we import fertilizer, so we need to look at how to use that biomass."

Wayne Takayama said Hawaii needs to adopt as policy the "political will to improve its agriculture," and should include education of all residents about agriculture, from birth to retirement.

"We can do a better job with education to get information to customers and the public," he said. "And we should educate our children with things like school gardens."

Doug McClure agreed that education is a top priority.

"We need to educate our kids, the consumers of the future," said McClure. "We need to educate our farmers so they know what's available in research, the best practices. We need to educate consumers to support local agriculture.

"We need to educate our city councils, and we need to educate our legislators to support us – sometimes that doesn't always happen."

McClure also recommended developing local SARE chapters.

"A lot of people simply don't know what SARE is," he said.

*"We need to elevate agriculture to a noble and profitable status. Being a farmer is a noble profession."*

*- Jerry Ross*



Wayne Takayama



Glen Teves



Claire Sullivan



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## RASMUSSEN NAMED TO AG STANDARDS REVIEW COMMITTEE

**P**hil Rasmussen, professor in the Plants, Soils, & Climate Department and Director of the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Center at Utah State University, was recently appointed to the Sustainable Agriculture Standards Review Committee.

This Review Committee is charged with reviewing various sustainability guidelines for food, fiber, and biofuel production and distribution. The Leonardo Academy, currently leading the effort to develop standards, received more than 200 nominations from academic institutions, industry and government entities. Rasmussen is one of only three academic/research professors named to the committee.

Recent national action by the committee set aside previously proposed standards as inadequate. The national



Phil Rasmussen

committee is now reviewing worldwide standards and specifications that describe a truly sustainable agricultural system.

In a separate development, unrelated to the Leonardo ANSI committee assignment, Rasmussen recently received a request to review the draft of a "sustainable principles document" (not a standard) from Dr. Steve Balling of Del Monte in California (representing a committee from

Del Monte, Western Growers and many Western fruit and vegetable professors and growers.)

"It appears that they feel their growers should work toward becoming more sustainable," said Rasmussen. "In many ways, to see the general industry take this approach – is a real success story for our program. It seems that everyone is talking 'sustainability.'"

Rasmussen was appointed director of what is now the USDA-CSREES Western Region SARE Center in 1994. In the 14 years that the Western SARE Center has been administered at Utah State University, it has received more than \$48 million in federal grants.

Recent Congressional increases to the national SARE research program brought \$4.2 million to the center on the USU campus for fiscal year 2009.