

**Administrative Council Handbook**

**Spring 2025**

**NCR-SARE**

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**North Central Region SARE**

**Host Institution - University Of Minnesota**

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The 12 states that make up North Central Region SARE**— Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin — have a rich agricultural history. The region embodies what most people think of when they envision the Heartland...endless rows of corn, strong family traditions, rural towns. The Heartland is this, and much more: modern cities, highly diversified farms, urban agriculture, community-supported agriculture, and more. The NCR-SARE challenge has been to hold fast to historical roots in a contemporary manner, preserving its place in the front lines of food production and promoting healthy food systems.**

**INTRODUCTION**

**From the wheat and cattle of the high plains to the dairy farms and orchards of the northeast; from the corn, soybeans, and tall grass in our center to horticulture in the Ohio River Valley; from community-supported agriculture to farm cooperatives region-wide, the NCR’s agricultural landscape is large and diverse.**

**The region’s cultural history, agricultural prowess, and innovative new systems behoove us to enhance rural areas and support healthy, productive farms and ranches. SARE strives to sustain NCR agriculture by encouraging research and education on economically viable and environmentally sound systems that strengthen communities.**

The North Central Region-SARE (NCR-SARE) program has awarded **more than $90 million worth of competitive grants** to farmers, ranchers, researchers, educators, public and private institutions, nonprofit groups, and others exploring sustainable agriculture in 12 states. Project abstracts can be found by searching the national SARE database at <https://projects.sare.org/>

Serving on the NCR-SARE Administrative Council is hard work, but the work is meaningful and it contributes to improved agricultural sustainability in the region. Feel free to contact the NCR-SARE Regional Coordinator for more information.

Please take some time to review our web site <http://www.northcentral.sare.org/>. We refer to the web site extensively in this handbook. The NCR-SARE website is our primary medium for posting updates and advances, current events, policies and procedures, and information about our programs. We’re also on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter.

Sustainable agriculture is defined by the USDA (7 USC 5801(b)) as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term:

**WHAT IS SARE?**

* satisfy human food and fiber needs;
* enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends;
* make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources and integrate, where  appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
* sustain the economic viability of farm/ranch operations; and
* enhance the quality of life for farmers/ranchers and society as a whole

SARE is a USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA)  competitive grants program for research and education in sustainable agriculture. While some SARE funding is used for administration and operations (staff salaries, meeting support), most of our funding is used to fund grant program projects. There are four regions belonging to SARE. Each region has its own staff and Administrative Council and operates independently. Congress allocates funds annually to SARE. Some funds are used to support national operations. The remaining funds are divided equally among the four regions. NCR-SARE issues calls for proposals or preproposals for programs specified by the Administrative Council. After proposals and preproposals have been received, review committees review proposals and preproposals and make recommendations to the Administrative Council. The Administrative Council decides which projects will be funded.  NCR-SARE staff handles the details of notifications and announcements, communications, the monitoring of projects, and the collection of reports for the projects.  Each region submits annual cooperative agreement proposals to USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA – formerly CSREES) for funding. Once funding is approved, regions have 5 years to spend the funds. SARE was created in 1990 and has continued to receive annual allocations of funds since 1990.

**NCR-SARE MISSION (2012)**

**Original Mission:** The mission of NCR-SARE is to create and manage a system designed to encourage the involvement of farm and non-farm citizens in the process of discovery and learning that leads to achieving a more sustainable, environmentally benign agriculture. This is congruent with the national legislation that created the USDA/NIFA research and education program now entitled "Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education" and the joint USDA/NIFA, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) research and education program entitled "Agriculture in Concert with the Environment (ACE)[[1]](#footnote-1)". **Revised Mission (2012):** North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education strengthens communities, increases farmer/rancher profitability, and improves the environment by supporting research and education.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the spring of 2007, the Administrative Council engaged in a strategic planning session and adopted the following goals, core ideologies, audacious goals, and action points.

**NCR-SARE GOALS & CORE IDEALOGIES (2007)**

**Goals**

* Foster site-specific, integrated farming systems
* Satisfy human food and fiber needs
* Enhance environmental quality, natural resource conservation, and the integration of on-farm and biological resources
* Enhance the quality of life and support owner-operated farms
* Protect human health and safety
* Promote crop, livestock, and enterprise diversity and the well-being of animals

**Core Ideologies**

* Core Value: The sustainability and well-being of all aspects of agriculture and those communities that support agriculture.
* Core Purpose: To preserve resources, to achieve the best environment possible, to produce the highest quality of product, and to maximize quality of life.

**Audacious Goals**

* Inclusivity: To include communities, ethnicity, gender, age, biodiversity, food, fiber, and fuel.
* Holistic: To use a “systems approach” in decision-making, resource utilization, and management.
* To have all farmers, ranchers, practitioners, and agricultural businesses committed to sustainable agriculture.

**Action Points**

* Create relationships among people, communities, and government and non-government institutions (develop friendships that create partnerships that accomplish our goals).
* Support education for all participants, for all ages, and with a specific focus on accomplishing our goals.
* Evaluate results of past and present programs with regard to intent, outcome, impacts, and reasons for their degree of success or failure.

Improve the use of SARE resources through goal orientation and restructured and/or better-focused calls for proposals (e.g., more emphasis on holistic approaches, resource preservation, quality food systems, and a community component).

North Central Region SARE administers several grant programs, each with specific priorities, audiences, and timelines. The focus for all NCR-SARE grant programs is on research and education. Funding considerations are based on how well the applicant presents the problem being addressed, the project's relevance to sustainable agriculture in the 12-state North Central region, and how well it aligns with NCR-SARE's goals, among other factors specific to each grant program. Additional information about each of NCR-SARE’s grant programs can be found on the website at [www.northcentral.sare.org/grants/](http://www.northcentral.sare.org/grants/)

**GRANT PROGRAMS**

**Farmer Rancher Grant Program**

Supports farmers and ranchers striving for agricultural sustainability.

* Farmer and Rancher Grant awards can be individual ($15,000 maximum), or team of two or more ($30,000 maximum).
* Projects may last up to 23 months.
* About 40 projects are funded annually.

**Youth Educator Grant Program**

The Youth Educator Grant Program is part of the Farmer Rancher Grant Program.

* Grants for educators to provide programming for youth. $6,000 maximum.
* Projects may last up to 23 months.
* About 15 projects are funded each year.

**Research and Education Grant Program**   
Supports researchers and educators with ideas for environmentally sound, economically viable, socially responsible agricultural systems.

* Research and Education grant awards range from $10,000 to $250,000.
* Projects may last up to 36 months or can propose a [long-term](https://www.northcentralsare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs#LongTerm) project.
* NCR-SARE funds about 16 Research and Education projects per year.

**Professional Development Competitive Grants Program**

Supports agricultural educators who learn in cooperation with farmers about sustainable practices and concepts.

* Professional Development Program awards up to $120,000
* Projects may last up to 36 months.
* About 10 projects are funded each year.

**Graduate Student Grant Program**

Provides funds to students enrolled in graduate programs at accredited colleges or universities who are exploring an aspect of sustainable agriculture for their thesis research or project paper.

* Graduate Student Grant awards can be up to $20,000.
* Projects may last up to 36 months.
* About 20 projects are funded each year.

**Partnership Grant Program**

Fosters cooperation between agriculture professionals and small groups of farmers and ranchers to catalyze on-farm research, demonstration, and education activities.

* Partnership Grant awards can be up to $50,000.
* Partnership Grants are for on-farm research, demonstration, and/or educational projects and are funded for up to 24 months.
* About 20 projects are funded each year.

**GRANT PROGRAM TIMELINES**

[Farmer Rancher](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Farmer-Rancher-Grant-Program)

August - Call for Proposals Released

December - Proposals Due

February - Funding Decisions

April-May - Funds Available to Recipients

[Graduate Student](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Graduate-Student-Grant-Program)

February - Call for Proposals Released

April - Proposals Due

July - Funding Decisions

September - Funds Available to Recipients

[Research and Education](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Research-and-Education)

August - Call for Preproposals Released

October- Preproposals Due

January - Full Proposals Invited

March - Full Proposals Due

July - Funding Decisions

November - Funds Available to Recipients

**OTHER INITIATIVES**

[Professional Development Program](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Professional-Development-Grant-Program)

February - Call for Proposals Released

April - Proposals Due

July - Funding Decisions

October - Funds Available to Recipients

[Youth Educator](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Youth-Educator-Grant-Program)

August - Call for Proposals Released

November - Proposals Due

February - Funding Decisions

March - Funds Available to Recipients

[Partnership](https://northcentral.sare.org/Grants/Our-Grant-Programs/Partnership-Grant-Program)

August - Call for Proposals Released

October - Proposals Due

February - Funding Decisions

March - Funds Available to Recipients

*\*Timeline projections are subject to change, so please consult our website at https://northcentral.sare.org/grants/apply-for-a-grant/*

You can read more about NCR-SARE’s special initiatives on the website at <https://northcentral.sare.org/about/regional-initiatives/>

**LEADERSHIP**

**Regional Administrative Council (AC)**

Representing various agricultural sectors, states, and organizations, [the](https://northcentral.sare.org/about/ncr-sare-leadership-and-policies/administrative-council/) [AC](https://northcentral.sare.org/about/ncr-sare-leadership-and-policies/administrative-council/) sets program priorities and makes granting decisions.

**Professional Development Program State Coordinators (PDP)**

Each state in the North Central Region has at least one [State Coordinator](https://northcentral.sare.org/state-programs/state-coordinators/) who receives some funding from NCR-SARE. State Coordinators direct sustainable agriculture education in their respective states. Most State Coordinators are employed by their state's 1862 or 1890 land-grant university. Started as a pilot program in 2023, NCR-SARE's 1994 Tribal College Coordinator conducts similar works at five Tribal colleges and communities in Michigan and Wisconsin.

**Regional Technical Committee (TC) and Review Committees**

Also comprised of agricultural stakeholders, the Technical Committee and other review committees review proposals and make recommendations to the AC.

**Staff**

[Staff](https://northcentral.sare.org/about/contact/) carries out AC directives, collecting and distributing SARE information on sustainable agriculture.

**HOST INSTITUTION**

The SARE legislation requires USDA to carry out the program through agreements with land grant colleges or universities, other universities, State agricultural experiment stations, the State cooperative extension services, nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise, or Federal or State governmental entities. NIFA provides funding to the four Regional Host Institutions (RHI) and the National Reporting, Coordinating and Communications Office (NRCCO) via annual cooperative agreements that each last up to five years such that the RHI and NRCCO administer multiple agreements concurrently.

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (NCR-SARE) was hosted at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln before moving in 2006 to the current host institution, the University of Minnesota. The program is housed in the Bioproducts and Biosystems Engineering building on the University of Minnesota –Twin Cities campus in St. Paul. In 2017 and 2022 the USDA-NIFA released a competitive Request for Applications to serve as the host institution for each of the four regions and the NRCCO for a five-year and ten-year term, respectively. The University of Minnesota was selected to continue serving as the North Central Region Host Institution through 2032, with a five-year review in 2028.

**Responsibilities and Requirements for NCR-SARE AC Members**

**ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL**

NCR-SARE is a USDA-funded grant program whose mission is to strengthen communities, increase farmer/rancher profitability, and improve the environment by supporting research and education. The NCR-SARE Administrative Council is responsible for the operation of the NCR-SARE program by appointing a host institution, defining policy, issuing calls for grant proposals, and making decisions about funding proposals. Council members are expected to attend Council meetings, review proposals and other materials distributed between meetings, and participate in NCR-SARE committees and occasional between-meeting conference calls.

AC members should be individuals who are interested in making agriculture more sustainable and who have some knowledge about sustainable agriculture; who are willing to commit the time and effort needed to review as many as 70-100 preproposals/proposals and other documents annually, and to participate in AC and committee meetings; and who have the skills needed to effectively serve on a policy and review council. Interpersonal skills, group skills, and the ability to contribute to policy discussion and the development of common goals are at least as important as technical skills.

The NCR-SARE AC meets twice a year in person. Several web conference meetings may also be held throughout the year. In-person meetings are usually two to three days long and are usually held in the region. AC members are expected to participate fully in meetings. NCR-SARE pays travel expenses to attend AC or other NCR-SARE meetings and NCR-SARE can pay a fee for service to  AC members for involvement in NCR-SARE activities. The purpose of the service payment is to make sure that service to NCR-SARE doesn’t cause financial hardship for AC members. If an AC member misses two consecutive meetings without explanation, that person/position will be brought to the AC for discussion for possible action.

**Makeup of the Administrative Council (Revised February 2021)**

There are 20 total members of the NCR-SARE Administrative Council (AC). Council members shall serve three-year terms with the opportunity to be re-elected or reappointed for one additional term.

Representation shall be as follows:

1. 4 farmers and/or ranchers who utilize systems and practices of sustainable agriculture
2. 2 representatives of non-profit organizations with demonstrable expertise on sustainable agriculture
3. 5 representatives of agricultural colleges and universities, specifically:
   1. 1 representative of the state cooperative extension service (appointed by the regional extension directors)
   2. 1 representative of a state agricultural experiment station (elected from experiment station administrators or faculty)
   3. 2 representatives of a minority-serving college or university (one from an 1890 and one from a 1994 institution)
   4. 1 at-large university representative
4. 1 agribusiness\* representative
5. 1 state department of agriculture representative
6. 1 representative of the Agricultural Research Service
7. 1 representative of a State Geological Survey or the U.S. Geological Survey
8. 1 representative of the Natural Resources Conservation Service
9. 1 representative of the Environmental Protection Agency
10. 1 representative of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture
11. 1 representative with expertise in rural sociology and/or quality of life factors pertaining to the social aspects of agricultural sustainability
12. 1 NCR-SARE technical committee chair or co-chair

\* The agribusiness representative should be involved in a for-profit agricultural enterprise other than farming/ranching, such as agricultural manufacturing or marketing, food processing, aggregation, distribution, agricultural sales or services, consulting, cooperatives, value-added agriculture enterprises, or other agricultural industry companies.

The NCR-SARE Administrative Council will give consideration to geographic and demographic representation as appropriate when filling vacant Administrative Council positions.  If the term of the person elected to serve as AC Chair ends during their year as Chair or as Past-Chair, the person’s term can be extended to allow service as Chair and/or Past-Chair. NCR-SARE staff attend and provide support and input at AC meetings, but they are not voting members of the AC.

**Administrative Council Nomination Procedures**

(November 2011, also see Nominating Committee Operating Procedures Appendix B)

Administrative Council Membership

1. The nomination process for Administrative Council (“AC” or “Council”) members is the same for vacated and term-limited seats.
   1. AC positions specified in legislation establishing SARE (1990 Farm Bill) can be found in the Nominating Committee Operating Procedures
   2. Positions are widely advertised. Those who are interested complete an online application. NCR-SARE solicits nominations from a number of groups, organizations, and agencies within the North Central region, including: sustainable agriculture organizations, other relevant not-for-profit organizations, Directors of Cooperative Extension, Directors of Ag Experiment Stations, Administrative Council members, State PDP Coordinators, ARS, NRCS, EPA, private foundations, and regional groups.
   3. Terms on the AC are generally three-year terms with the opportunity to be re-elected or reappointed for one additional term.
   4. AC members should be individuals who…
      1. Are interested in making agriculture more sustainable and who have some knowledge about sustainable agriculture;
         1. The term “sustainable agriculture” shall have the same meaning given to the term by section 1404(17) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 1303(17)).
      2. Are willing to commit the time and effort needed to review proposals and other documents;
      3. Are able and willing to participate in AC and committee meetings;
      4. Have the skills needed to effectively serve on a policy and review council.
         1. Interpersonal skills, group skills and ability to contribute to policy discussion and to development of common goals are at least as important as technical skills.
   5. Candidates (or their nominators) must ensure that the following steps are completed in order to be nominated for an AC position:
      1. to nominate yourself for a seat on the NCR-SARE Administrative Council, submit the information using our online form at https://docs.google.com/a/umn.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdLa-Wf2wDdo9JJOGsaBeKIdA-qDcOe1W9c4AKzJz96GVY4OQ/viewform
         1. the nominee’s areas of interest or focus in sustainable agriculture
         2. why the nominee is interested in serving on NCR-SARE's Administrative Council
         3. the nominee’s experience, affiliations and/or qualifications
         4. Resumes are encouraged but not required.
   6. Applications are reviewed by the Nominations committee, and the committee typically narrows to two or three nominations for each open position that are then put to a vote by the Administrative Council.
   7. Before an election can proceed, NCR-SARE should receive at least two nominations for each open position, with the exception of the positions held by NRCS, EPA, ARS, and Extension Directors (which are traditionally appointed by the named organization).
      1. If this condition is not met, the AC must vote to waive this requirement.

**Committee Work**

A major responsibility of AC members is to participate in grant review.  Every Administrative Council member reviews Research and Education preproposals.  In addition, each AC member serves on one fall/winter and one other review committee (Farmer Rancher, Graduate and Youth Educator in Nov-Jan, and Professional Development and Research and Education in April-June). Administrative Council (AC) members are encouraged to actively participate in additional NCR-SARE committees that fit their interests. NCR-SARE has some operational standing committees, like the Executive Committee, Nominations Committee, and the Executive Committee.  NCR-SARE makes frequent use of ad hoc committees to explore new initiatives to present to the Administrative Council. Most NCR-SARE review committees have at least 50% of their members on the AC; non-AC members can be staff, NCR-SARE alumni, or others who can contribute to the committee’s work.

**Current NCR-SARE committees:**

Alumni Organization: The North Central Region SARE Alumni Organization (NCSAO) assists NCR-SARE in leadership and program implementation, specifically the NCR-SARE Heroes Recognition. See Appendix C for more details.

Communications Advisory Group: This committee advises the NCR-SARE Communication Specialist on communications issues. See Appendix B for more details.

Executive Committee (EC): The Executive Committee consists of the AC chair, AC vice-chair, a co-chair of the Technical Committee, and two at-large members from the AC. They act on time sensitive issues on behalf of the AC between AC meetings. See Appendix B for more details.

Farmer Rancher Grant Review Committee: This committee has at least 4 AC members on a committee of 30 people, mostly Farmers and Ranchers (> 75%). They review Farmer Rancher grant proposals and prepares a list of recommended proposals for the AC to consider funding. See Appendix B for more details.

Graduate Student Review Committee: This committee consists of three members from the Administrative Council, and external committee members. reviews proposals submitted in response to NCR-SARE’s call for graduate student proposals and makes funding recommendations to the AC. See Appendix B for more details.

Nominating Committee: This committee’s purpose is to help identify and recruit members for the AC and Executive Committee, with special attention being given to limited-resource and socially-disadvantaged audiences. See Appendix B for more details.

Partnership Grant Program Committee: This committee consists of AC members with some external reviewers. They issue the call for proposals and review the incoming proposals for the Partnership Grant Program. They recommend proposals to the AC for funding. See Appendix B for more details.

Professional Development Program (PDP) Review Committee: This committee consists of AC members and one or two non-AC members recruited by the PDP Coordinator. The committee reviews the PDP competitive grant proposals and recommends a list of proposals for funding to the AC. The committee also reviews annual reports and proposed Plans of Work submitted by the NCR State Coordinators and recommends funding to the AC. See Appendix B for more details.

Technical Committee (TC): This committee is specified in the SARE legislation. This approximately 20-person committee reviews Research and Education full grant proposals and prepares a recommended list of technically acceptable proposals for the AC to consider for funding. Terms are three years. The Technical Committee chair has a seat on *ex officio* seat on the AC. Two AC members volunteer to serve two-year terms on the TC. See Appendix B for more details.

Youth Educator Committee: This committee is composed of AC members, State Coordinators, AC Alumni, and others with an interest in Sustainable Agriculture youth education. They review Youth Educator Grant Program proposals and recommend proposals to the AC for funding. They also engage in outreach for Youth Educators. See Appendix B for more details.

**SARE National Committees:**

SARE Operations Committee: This is the committee that makes overall policy and budget decisions for SARE. Membership consists of the Chapter 1 Coordinator for each SARE Region, one Regional PDP Coordinator (elected by the other Regional PDP Coordinators), representatives of several Federal agencies that SARE works with, representatives from the national SARE office and NIFA, and members of each SARE Region’s AC. In the NCR, the AC Chair is the AC representative.

SARE Outreach Steering Committee: The SARE Outreach Steering Committee provides input on all aspects of SARE's national outreach efforts, including budget development, publication topics, outreach priorities, and long-range planning. Committee members are drawn from around the country to represent the diversity of U.S. agriculture. The regional Communications Specialist serves on this committee, and each regional Administrative Council selects one member to serve on this committee.

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Area of Expertise: Cover Crops, Soil Health, Agribusiness  
Term: Started in 2024; Expires in 2027; Keith is eligible for re-nomination

**ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL (AC) MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY**

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Term: Started in 2021; Re-elected; Expires 2027

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Area of expertise: Agronomy, Cropping Systems  
Term: Indefinite; Kristi started as Associate SARE Director in 2021

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Term: Started 2025; Expires 2028; Kaya is eligible for re-nomination

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Sector: Nonprofit  
  
Area of expertise: Youth Mentorship, Urban Ag, VegetablesTerm: Started 2025; Expires 2028; Aaron is eligible for re-nomination

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Area of expertise: Conservation, Natural Resources, Forestry  
Term: Started in 2024; Expires 2027; Nate is eligible for re-nomination **Mary Hendrickson**  
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Sector: Sociology  
Area of Expertise: Community Food Systems, Sociology  
Term: Started 2020; Re-elected; Expires 2026

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Term: Started 2022; Re-elected; Expires 2028

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Term: Started 2012; Re-elected; Expires 2025

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Term: Started 2022; Re-elected; Expires 2028;

Vacant, seeking nominations:  
- Representative of 1994 institution

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**TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT (March 2023)**

While under contract with the University of Minnesota, Contractors shall be subject to the following travel reimbursement terms & conditions and limits.

All travel paid or reimbursed to Contractors from University-administered funds must be done in accordance with University policies. [Reimbursable/non-reimbursable travel-related expenses](https://policy.umn.edu/finance/travel-appi) is a helpful guide.

Contractors are expected to exercise good judgment when incurring travel costs. Contractors will only be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary travel expenses actually incurred in the performance of official duties in accordance with the provisions in the contract. Contractors shall not seek reimbursement for expenses not incurred; expenses provided free of charge; or expenses which will be paid or reimbursed from another source.

**Receipts**

Original itemized receipts are required for reimbursement of travel expenses (e.g., airfare, hotel, car rental). Original itemized receipts are actual vendor receipts, not credit card charge slips or statements. ***Under University of Minnesota policy, receipts for meals are not required; United States General Services Administration (GSA) per diem rates will be used instead.*** See additional information in the “Meals” section of this document.

**Airfare**

Travel by air is limited to the lowest, non-refundable, fare class available at the time of booking that meets the requirements listed below and meets the traveler’s needs.

* Basic Economy
* Not recommended because seat assignments are not assigned until check-in and ticket changes or upgrades are not allowed
* Economy- allowed for all flights
* Premium Economy – allowed for flights 4 or more hours with no additional approval
* Business – allowed for flights 8 or more hours (including connecting domestic legs).  Travelers should obtain pre-approval from their supervisor.  Supervisors may deny a portion of the airfare if the traveler does not obtain pre-approval for the upgrade.
* First – not allowed

Each airline may have different designations for fare/seat classes than those listed above.  Contact Purchasing Services if the traveler is unsure what fare class to book.

**Additional Fees:**

* Fees to reserve coach/economy seats ahead of check-in are allowed.
* Baggage: The first piece of baggage within the airlines’ weight and size limits is allowable. Costs for additional baggage beyond the first piece and overweight or oversized baggage may be allowable with a valid business justification.

**Frequent Flyer Miles**

* Frequent flyer miles or any other benefit issued by an airline must accrue to the benefit of the University whenever University funds are used to pay for airline travel, regardless of the origination of those funds (for example, from state or federal grants, contracts, appropriations, or private donors). Travelers may not use these miles for their personal travel. See [Minnesota State Statute, 15.435](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/2013/cite/15.435).
* Travelers, rather than departments, are responsible for tracking miles earned with University funds, and providing records of such tracking upon request. When travelers have accumulated enough frequent flyer miles to earn free travel, they must use the miles for University travel.
* Infrequent travelers (those who take no more than two trips per year) are not required to track frequent flyer miles.
* At its discretion, the University may require the same for Contractors if there is a possibility that the business relationship will last long enough for the Contractor to accrue enough miles to earn a free airline ticket(s). In this case the Contractor would be required to use a free ticket(s) for University business.

**Lodging**

Contractors are encouraged to use [the U-Wide Pricing Agreements](https://uwidecontracts.umn.edu/) for lodging when traveling to the Twin Cities campuses.

Hotel guest lodging may not exceed 150% of the lodging per diem nightly rate (before taxes) for the destination city. Actual nightly rate lodging expenses (excluding taxes and fees) for the trip may not exceed the cumulative total allowable lodging per diem. Refer to [GSA per diem rates.](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates?gsaredirect=perdiem)

**Mileage Use of Personal Vehicles**

Contractor’s use of personal vehicle(s) for University business must be pre-approved by the University Contract Administrator.

The University will not reimburse mileage to exceed the current IRS maximum allowed rate. Mileage rate includes gas, vehicle maintenance and other vehicle related costs for which University will not pay separately.

If a traveler elects to drive a vehicle in lieu of flying, a price comparison for airfare must be done by the traveler prior to the trip and submitted with the expense report. Any additional expenses, such as lodging, car rental fees, mileage, or parking, up to the amount of the lowest economy airfare that would have met the traveler’s needs is what is typically allowable.

**Car Rental**

If necessary to rent a vehicle, pre-approval is required by the University Contract Administrator.

Contractors are encouraged to rent from the University’s U-Wide Contract car rental supplier. Rental must be at midsize rate or less, unless specified otherwise in the Contractor’s contract with the University.

The University will reimburse gas charges for University business only, not personal use of a rental vehicle.

**Meals**

Travelers are responsible for using personal funds to pay for meal and incidental expenses. The University will reimburse these expenses using [federally established per diem rates](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates) for the destination city of their travel. Travelers may use one location (for example, lodging location) for per diem for each day of travel.

* Meals included in the cost of airfares, lodging, or as part of an event are not reimbursable.
* First and last days of travel meal per diems are calculated at 75% irrespective of the time of day that the traveler leaves or arrives back home.
* Travelers will not be reimbursed for:
  + Meal expenses exceeding the maximum meal rate for their destination city; or
  + When a traveler’s meal is part of a conference or event, the traveler should deduct the appropriate meal from their meal per diem for the day.

**Incidentals**

Travelers should not submit or request reimbursement for any of these items, as they are included in the daily incidental amount.

* Gratuities for baggage carriers, porters, and hotel staff
* ATM fees, bank fee, and check cashing charges
* Laundry and valet expenses (international travel)
  + Travelers may request reimbursement for laundry for domestic travel lasting seven or more consecutive days.

**Miscellaneous Expenses**

The following are NOT reimbursable expenses to hired consultants or contractors:

• Lost or stolen cash or personal property

• Personal items and services

• Laundry, dry cleaning, pressing costs

• Traffic citations, parking tickets, and other fines

• Excess cost of circuitous or side trips for personal reasons

• Repairs, towing, etc. for personal vehicles

• Personal entertainment or sightseeing

• Excess baggage charges for personal items

• Airline flight change fees

• Airline, car, hotel, club memberships

• Childcare costs

• Kennel fees

• Late payment penalties and interest on credit cards

List of Useful links:

[Reimbursable / Non-reimbursable travel-related expenses](https://policy.umn.edu/finance/travel-appi)

[UMN Travel Policy](https://policy.umn.edu/finance/travel)

[US General Services Administration (GSA)](https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-book/per-diem-rates)

[U-wide Pricing Agreements](https://uwidecontracts.umn.edu/)

**ADVISORY FEE POLICY (July 2023)**

**North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Advisory Fee Policy (rev. 7/2023)**

*Background*

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for compensating individuals who review proposals, attend meetings, or participate in other activities at NCR-SARE’s request. NCR-SARE recognizes that service on the SARE Administrative Council requires considerable time and commitment, and we do not want NCR-SARE work to be a financial burden to the individual or their business/employer. The partial or total compensation, as described below, can be paid to these individuals.

They must comply with their employer’s policies regarding consultation.

[Note that NCR-SARE reimburses meeting participants for actual expenses for traveling to meetings and for phone calls to participate in conference calls. The focus of this policy is on compensation for time spent on NCR-SARE activities.]

*Compensation Amount*

Compensation for involvement in NCR-SARE activities is considered to be an advisory fee. It is not intended to be a direct payment for actual losses in income. The intent is to provide some financial compensation for specific tasks or for blocks of time spent on NCR-SARE activities instead of time spent on income-generating activities.

NCR-SARE compensation for participation in away-from-home meetings, workshops, or conferences where the individual has been asked by NCR-SARE to participate is $200 per full day (more than four hours) and $100 per part-day (four hours or less). Compensation can include time spent at the meeting plus reasonable travel time to and from the meeting. For example, if a meeting runs from Wednesday morning to Thursday noon, but the individual leaves home Tuesday afternoon and returns home Thursday evening, compensation would be two full days x $200 per day plus 1 part day x $100 or $500 total. Individuals are not eligible for compensation for events that they attend voluntarily (they were not specifically asked to participate by NCR-SARE).

In addition, reviewers will be compensated for scheduled time for review committee conferences or online calls at a rate of $25 per scheduled hour.

NCR-SARE compensation for reviewing Research and Education preproposals is $15.00 per preproposal. NCR-SARE compensation for reviewing Partnership proposals, Youth Educator proposals, Graduate Student grant proposals, and State Plans of Work is $22.50 per proposal. NCR-SARE compensation for reviewing full Research and Education proposals, Professional Development Program proposals, and Farmer Rancher proposals is $30.00 per proposal. In addition, for Research and Education proposals, abstract and comment summary review is compensated at $15 per proposal. Compensation is intended to cover time spent reading the proposals, completing score

sheets, writing comments, and participating in conference calls to discuss proposals. If individuals are also asked to attend a meeting to discuss the proposals, they can receive additional compensation for attending the meeting, as described earlier.

*Compensation Method*

Individuals can collect an advisory fee through the NCR-SARE office in Saint Paul, MN. The fee calculation can include both time spent attending in-person review meetings or online/conference calls and the number of documents reviewed [for example, 1.5 days for meeting and travel time x $200 per day ($300) plus 12 full proposals reviewed x $15.00 per proposal ($180) for a total of $480].

Questions

If you have questions about this policy, you can contact the NCR-SARE office at [ncrsare@umn.edu](mailto:ncrsare@umn.edu) or call 612.626.3113.

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**CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY (July 2017)**

The SARE program strongly feels that committee members should not be involved in making decisions that could raise doubts about the objectivity of the Administrative Council or committee decisions. We have, therefore, developed a policy that seeks to avoid both the appearance and reality of a conflict of interest (see below)—something that might be of benefit to

* + the individual Council or committee member or their family,
  + someone with whom the Council or committee member has a recent business or professional relationship, or
  + someone from the Council or committee member's work institution. We also discourage Council and committee members from making decisions regarding projects with PIs or cooperators with whom they either are close friends or have an adversarial relationship.

According to the SARE authorizing legislation, a member of an AC or Technical Committee may not participate in the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects if the member has or has a professional or business interest in the organization whose grant application is under review. (7 USC 5812(c)). This language is interpreted and operationalized as follows:

To avoid any conflict of interest, a member of the Regional Administrative Council (AC), Technical Committee (TC), any AC-appointed committees or panels, State Coordinator, or staff may not review or participate in the discussion or recommendation regarding any competitive grant proposal with any of the following characteristics:

1. From that member’s institution or organization;
2. From institutions or organizations for which he/she acts as a paid consultant, or board member;
3. For applicants for whom he/she has served as a thesis advisor (or advisee) or postdoctoral advisor (or advisee); for thesis committee members, the restriction is three years from the time the degree was awarded.
4. From applicants with whom he/she has served as a collaborator on a research proposal or publication within the past 3 years;
5. From applicants for whom he/she has acted as a paid consultant within the past 3 years;
6. From applicants for whom he/she will be a project participant during the current grant cycle;

In addition:

1. Members of the NCR-SARE Technical Committee and members of any other NCR-SARE regional grant review committees or panels may not be listed as participants on any competitive grants under consideration by the grant review committee or panel on which the person serves.
2. NCR-SARE staff, state coordinators, and Administrative Council members, may not be listed as a participant in the submission of a proposal. If the proposal is funded, at that point, the project PI may ask an NCR-SARE-connected individual to be a speaker at a project event or provide input on a project, provided that such service is unpaid in terms of honorarium, consulting, fee, salary or other input payment.  However, they may receive a travel reimbursement as needed.
3. Grant reviewers can provide general grant information to applicants but cannot assist with writing grant proposals or provide specific advice on grant proposals under consideration by the committee or panel on which they serve. NCR-SARE State Coordinators are an exception since they are responsible for helping grant applicants. They can assist with grant applications but must declare a conflict if they are serving on a review committee.
4. The Conflict of Interest statement applies to current members.  Those wanting to submit proposals must resign their committee memberships.

**Questions**

If you have questions about this policy, you can contact the NCR-SARE office at [ncrsare@umn.edu](mailto:ncrsare@umn.edu) or call 612.626.3113.

**ELECTRONIC VOTING POLICY (March 2016)**

When it is necessary for the NCR-SARE Administrative Council or any of its committees to make decisions in the absence of a formal, in-person meeting setting, it is acceptable for information to be distributed to Council members electronically (e.g., by e-mail, fax, or access to a website), and for votes to be taken electronically (e.g., by e-mail, fax, teleconference, videoconference, or via a website), with not less than three working days for electronic comments and/or discussion. A majority of the total number of council or committee members is required to approve the item for which the vote is being taken.

**Implementation Procedures:**

* Any electronic voting process should be managed so that it is as close as possible to voting in-person.
* The voting process should be managed by the chair (or by a substitute designated by the chair) of the group that is being asked to vote.
* After the situation in which group members are being asked to vote has been presented, there will be a “discussion” period before voting begins. For teleconferences, each member of the group should be given a chance to comment (within reasonable time limits) before the chair calls for a vote. For e-mail, group members should have at least three working days (but no more than ten working days) to comment, by e-mail, to the rest of the group before the chair calls for a vote
* During the discussion period, the normal NCR-SARE Conflict of Interest policy shall be followed. Group members shall publicly declare any conflicts of interest to the rest of the group and then refrain from participating in discussion and in voting on the issue for which they have a conflict.
* On teleconferences, the chair may use a roll-call vote if the results of normal voice voting are not clear. For e-mail voting, the chair shall set a deadline for voting and may request that votes be sent to just the chair (similar to paper or secret balloting) or to the whole group (similar to voting with a show of hands). The chair shall provide instructions on specific language or ballot markings to be used in voting (for example, “yes” or “no”) so that voting results are not ambiguous. After the voting deadline, the chair will summarize the votes and report the results back to the whole group.
* A change in the principal investigator (PI) of a grant project can be voted upon immediately at the time the question is posed.

**LEGISLATION**

**The SARE Program was created in the 1990 Farm Bill.**

**Title XVI of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990**

Title XVI of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA) authorizes research and education programs designed to:

1. continue to satisfy human food and fiber needs;

2. enhance the long-term viability and competitiveness of the food production and agricultural system of the United States within the global economy;

3. expand economic opportunities in rural America and enhance the quality of life for farmers, rural citizens, and society as a whole;

4. improve the productivity of the American agricultural system and develop new agricultural crops and new uses for agricultural commodities;

5. develop information and systems to enhance the environment and natural resource base upon which a sustainable agricultural economy depends; or

6. enhance human health by

a. fostering the availability and affordability of a safe, wholesome, and nutritious food supply that meets the needs and preferences of the consumer; and

b. assisting farmers and other rural residents in the detection and prevention of health and safety concerns (Sec. 1602).

Subtitle B of Title XVI authorizes research and education programs in sustainable agriculture. *Guidelines* for implementation of Subtitle B, the SARE Program, were developed by a USDA Task Force with representation from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, Experiment Station Committee on Organization and Policy (ESCOP), and Extension Committee on Organization and Policy (ECOP), National Association of State University and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) and Agriculture Research Service (ARS).

Subtitle B contains three chapters:

Chapter 1 -- Best Utilization of Biological Applications (SARE);

Chapter 2 -- Integrated Management Systems;

Chapter 3 -- Technology Development and Transfer (Professional Development Program (PDP)).

(Note that Chapter 2 has never been funded)

**FARM BILL (updated after 2008 Farm Bill)**

**The pertinent sections of the US Code are 7USC 3103 (19), definition of Sustainable Agriculture; 7USC 5801-5814, aka “Chapter 1” and 7USC 5831-5832, aka “Chapter 3”.**

**SUBCHAPTER I—SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND EDUCATION**

§ 5801. Purpose and definitions.

(a) Purpose. It is the purpose of this subchapter to encourage research designed to increase our knowledge concerning agricultural production systems that—

(1) maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of the soil;

(2) conserve soil, water, energy, natural resources, and fish and wildlife habitat;

(3) maintain and enhance the quality of surface and ground water;

(4) protect the health and safety of persons involved in the food and farm system;

(5) promote the well being of animals; and

(6) increase employment opportunities in agriculture.

(b) Definitions. For purposes of this subchapter:

(1) The term ‘‘sustainable agriculture’’ shall have the same meaning given to that term by section 3103 of this title.

(2) The term ‘‘integrated crop management’’ means an agricultural management system that integrates all controllable agricultural production factors for long-term sustained productivity, profitability, and ecological soundness.

(3) The term ‘‘integrated resource management’’ means livestock management which utilizes an interdisciplinary systems approach which integrates all controllable agricultural production practices to provide long-term sustained productivity and profitable production of safe and wholesome food in an environmentally sound manner.

(4) The term ‘‘agribusiness’’ includes a producer or organization engaged in an agricultural enterprise with a profit motive.

(5) The term ‘‘extension’’ shall have the same meaning given to that term by section 3103 of this title.

(6) The term ‘‘Secretary’’ means the Secretary of Agriculture.

(7) The term ‘‘State’’ means each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or federally recognized Indian tribes.

(8) The term ‘‘State agricultural experiment stations’’ shall have the same meaning given to that term by section 3103 of this title.

(9) The term ‘‘nonprofit organization’’ means an organization, group, institute, or institution that—

(A) has a demonstrated capacity to conduct agricultural research or education programs;

(B) has experience in research, demonstration, education, or extension in sustainable agricultural practices and systems; and

(C) qualifies as a nonprofit organization under section 501(c) of title 26.

**CHAPTER 1—Part A—BEST UTILIZATION OF BIOLOGICAL APPLICATIONS**

§ 5811. Research and extension projects

(a) Projects required. The Secretary shall conduct research and extension projects to obtain data, develop conclusions, demonstrate technologies, and conduct educational programs that promote the purposes of this part, including research and extension projects that—

(1) facilitate and increase scientific investigation and education in order to—

(A) reduce, to the extent feasible and practicable, the use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and toxic natural materials in agricultural production;

(B) improve low-input farm management to enhance agricultural productivity, profitability, and competitiveness; and

(C) promote crop, livestock, and enterprise diversification; and

(2) facilitate the conduct of projects in order to—

(A) study, to the extent practicable, agricultural production systems that are located in areas that possess various soil, climate, and physical characteristics;

(B) study farms that have been, and will continue to be, managed using farm production practices that rely on low-input and conservation practices

(C) take advantage of the experience and expertise of farmers and ranchers through their direct participation and leadership in projects;

(D) transfer practical, reliable and timely information to farmers and ranchers concerning low-input sustainable farming practices and systems; and

(E) promote a partnership between farmers, nonprofit organizations, agribusiness, and public and private research and extension institutions.

(b) Agreements. The Secretary shall carry out this section through agreements entered into with land grant colleges or universities, other universities, State agricultural experiment stations, the State cooperative extension services, nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise, or Federal or State governmental entities.

(c) Selection of projects

(1) In general, the Secretary shall select research and extension projects to be conducted under this section on the basis of—

(A) the relevance of the project to the purposes of this part;

(B) the appropriateness of the design of the project;

(C) the likelihood of obtaining the objectives of the project; and

(D) the national or regional applicability of the findings and outcomes of the proposed project.

(2) Priority. In conducting projects under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to projects that—

(A) closely coordinate research and extension activities;

(B) indicate the manner in which the findings of the project will be made readily usable by farmers;

(C) maximize the involvement and cooperation of farmers, including projects involving on-farm research and demonstration;

(D) involve a multidisciplinary systems approach; and

(E) involve cooperation between farms, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities, and government agencies.

(d) Diversification of research. The Secretary shall conduct projects and studies under this section in areas that are broadly representative of the diversity of United States agricultural production, including production on family farms, mixed-crop livestock farms and dairy operations.

(e) On-farm research. The Secretary may conduct projects and activities that involve on-farm research and demonstration in carrying out this section.

(f) Impact studies. The Secretary may approve study projects concerning the national and regional economic, global competitiveness, social and environmental implications of the adoption of low-input sustainable agricultural practices and systems.

(g) Project duration

(1) In general, the Secretary may approve projects to be conducted under this section that have a duration of more than one fiscal year.

(2) Sequence planting. In the case of a research project conducted under this section that involves the planting of a sequence of crops or crop rotations, the Secretary shall approve such projects for a term that is appropriate to the sequence or rotation being studied.

(h) Public access. The Secretary shall ensure that research projects conducted under this section are open for public observation at specified times.

(i) Indemnification

(1) In general, subject to paragraph (2), the Secretary may indemnify the operator of a project conducted under this section for damage incurred or undue losses sustained as a result of a rigid requirement of research or demonstration under such project that is not experienced in normal farming operations.

(2) Subject to agreement. An indemnity payment under paragraph (1) shall be subject to any agreement between a project grantee and operator entered into prior to the initiation of such project.

**§ 5812. Program Administration**

(a) Duties of Secretary

The Secretary shall—

(1) administer the programs and projects conducted under sections 5811 and 5813 of this title through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, and other appropriate agencies;

(2) establish a minimum of four Regional Administrative Councils in accordance with subsection (b) of this section; and

(3) in conjunction with such Regional Administrative Councils, identify regional host institutions required to carry out such programs or projects.

(b) Regional Administrative Councils

(1) Membership. The membership of the Regional Administrative Councils shall include representatives of—

(A) the Agricultural Research Service;

(B) the National Institute of Food and Agriculture;

(C) State cooperative extension services;

(D) State agricultural experiment stations;

(E) the Soil Conservation Service;

(F) State departments engaged in sustainable agriculture programs;

(G) nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise;

(H) farmers utilizing systems and practices of sustainable agriculture;

(I) agribusiness;

(J) the State or United States Geological Survey; and

(K) other persons knowledgeable about sustainable agriculture and its impact on the environment and rural communities.

(2) Responsibilities. The Regional Administrative Councils shall—

(A) promote the programs established under this subchapter at the regional level;

(B) establish goals and criteria for the selection of projects authorized under this subchapter within the applicable region;

(C) appoint a technical committee to evaluate the proposals for projects to be considered under this subchapter by such council;

(D) review and act on the recommendations of the technical committee, and coordinate its activities with the regional host institution; and

(E) prepare and make available an annual report concerning projects funded under sections 5811 and 5813 of this title, together with an evaluation of the project activity.

(3) Conflict of interest

A member of the Regional Administrative Council or a technical committee may not participate in the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects if the member has or had a professional or business interest in, including the provision of consultancy services, the organization whose grant application is under review.

**§ 5813. Federal-State Matching Grant Program**

(a) Establishment. The Secretary shall establish a Federal-State matching grant program to make grants to States to assist in the creation or enhancement of State sustainable agriculture research, extension, and education programs, in furtherance of this subchapter.

(b) Eligible programs and activities States eligible to receive a grant under this section may conduct a variety of activities designed to carry out the purpose of this subchapter, including—

(1) activities that encourage the incorporation and integration of sustainable agriculture concerns in all State research, extension, and education projects;

(2) educational programs for farmers, educators, and the public;

(3) the development and funding of innovative research, extension, and education programs regarding sustainable agriculture;

(4) the conduct of research and demonstration projects;

(5) the provision of technical assistance to farmers and ranchers;

(6) activities that encourage farmer-to-farmer information exchanges;

(7) the incorporation of sustainable agriculture studies in undergraduate and graduate degree programs; and

(8) such other activities that are appropriate to the agricultural concerns of the State that are consistent with the purpose of this part.

(c) Submission of plan

(1) Required States that elect to apply for a grant under this section shall prepare and submit, to the appropriate Regional Administrative Council established under section 5812 of this title, a State plan and schedule for approval by such council and the Secretary.

(2) Elements of plan State plans prepared under paragraph (1) shall provide details of the proposed program to be implemented using funds provided under this section for fiscal years 1991 through 1995, or any 5-year period thereafter, and shall identify the sources of matching State funds for the same fiscal year.

(3) Participation of farmers. To be eligible for approval, State plans submitted under this subsection shall demonstrate that there will be extensive and direct participation of farmers in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the program.

(d) Grant award

(1) Limits. Subject to paragraph (2), the Secretary shall provide grants to eligible States in an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the cost of the establishment or enhancement of a State sustainable agriculture program under a plan approved by the Secretary under subsection (c) of this section for a period not to exceed 5 years.

(2) State contribution To be eligible to receive a grant under this section, a State shall agree to pay, from State appropriated funds, other State revenue, or from private contributions received by the State, not less than 50 percent of the cost of the establishment or enhancement of the sustainable agriculture program under an approved plan under subsection (c) of this section.

**§ 5814. Authorization Of Appropriations**

There are authorized to be appropriated $40,000,000 for each fiscal year to carry out this part. Of amounts appropriated to carry out this part for a fiscal year, not less than $15,000,000, or not less than two thirds of any such appropriation, whichever is greater, shall be used to carry out sections 5811 and 5812 of this title.

**CHAPTER 2—PART B—INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

**§ 5821. Integrated Management Systems**

(a) Establishment. The Secretary shall establish a research and education program concerning integrated resource management and integrated crop management in order to enhance research related to farming operations, practices, and systems that optimize crop and livestock production potential and are environmentally sound. The purpose of the program shall be—

(1) to encourage producers to adopt integrated crop and livestock management practices and systems that minimize or abate adverse environmental impacts, reduce soil erosion and loss of water and nutrients, enhance the efficient use of on-farm and off-farm inputs, and maintain or increase profitability and long-term productivity;

(2) to develop knowledge and information on integrated crop and livestock management systems and practices to assist agricultural producers in the adoption of these systems and practices;

(3) to accumulate and analyze information on agricultural production practices researched or developed under programs established under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate programs of the Department of Agriculture to further the development of integrated crop and livestock management systems;

(4) to facilitate the adoption of whole-farm integrated crop and livestock management systems through demonstration projects on individual farms, including small and limited resource farms, throughout the United States; and

(5) to evaluate and recommend appropriate integrated crop and livestock management policies and programs.

(b) Development and adoption of integrated crop management practices. The Secretary shall encourage agricultural producers to adopt and develop individual, sitespecific integrated crop management practices. On a priority basis, the Secretary shall develop and disseminate information on integrated crop management systems for agricultural producers in specific localities or crop producing regions where the Secretary determines—

(1) water quality is impaired as a result of local or regional agricultural production practices; or

(2) the adoption of such practices may aid in the recovery of endangered or threatened species.

(c) Development and adoption of integrated resource management practices. The Secretary shall, on a priority basis, develop programs to encourage livestock producers to develop and adopt individual, site-specific integrated resource management practices. These programs shall be designed to benefit producers and consumers through—

(1) optimum use of available resources and improved production and financial efficiency for producers;

(2) identifying and prioritizing the research and educational needs of the livestock industry relating to production and financial efficiency, competitiveness, environmental stability, and food safety; and

(3) utilizing an interdisciplinary approach.

(d) Authorization of appropriations. There are authorized to be appropriated for each fiscal year $20,000,000 to carry out this section through the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

**§ 5822. Integrated Farm Management Program Option**

(a) Establishment. The Secretary of Agriculture (hereafter in this section referred to as the ‘‘Secretary’’) shall, by regulation, establish a voluntary program, to be known as the ‘‘Integrated Farm Management Program Option’’ (hereafter referred to in this section as the ‘‘program’’), designed to assist producers of agricultural commodities in adopting integrated, multiyear, site-specific farm management plans by reducing farm program barriers to resource stewardship practices and systems.

(b) Definitions

(1) In general, for purposes of this section—

(A) The term ‘‘resource-conserving crop’’ means legumes, legume-grass mixtures, legume-small grain mixtures, legume-grasssmall grain mixtures, and alternative crops.

(B) The term ‘‘resource-conserving crop rotation’’ means a crop rotation that includes at least one resource-conserving crop and that reduces erosion, maintains or improves soil fertility and tilth, interrupts pest cycles, or conserves water.

(C) The term ‘‘farming operations and practices’’ includes the integration of crops and crop-plant variety selection, rotation practices, tillage systems, soil conserving and soil building practices, nutrient management strategies, biological control and integrated pest management strategies, livestock production and management systems, animal waste management systems, water and energy conservation measures, and health and safety considerations.

(D) The term ‘‘integrated farm management plan’’ means a comprehensive, multiyear, site-specific plan that meets the requirements of subsection (f) of this section.

(2) Crops. For purposes of paragraph (1)(A)—

(A) The term ‘‘grass’’ means perennial grasses commonly used for haying or grazing.

(B) The term ‘‘legume’’ means forage legumes (such as alfalfa or clover) or any legume grown for use as a forage or green manure, but not including any bean crop from which the seeds are harvested.

(C) The term ‘‘small grain’’ shall not include malting barley or wheat, except for wheat interplanted with other small grain crops for nonhuman consumption.

(D) The term ‘‘alternative crops’’ means experimental and industrial crops grown in arid and semiarid regions that conserve soil and water.

(c) Eligibility. To be eligible to participate in the program established by this section, a producer must—

(1) prepare and submit to the Secretary for approval an integrated farm management plan (hereafter referred to in this section as the ‘‘plan’’);

(2) actively apply the terms and conditions of the plan, as approved by the Secretary;

(3) devote to a resource-conserving crop, on the average through the life of the contract, not less than 20 percent of the crop acreage bases enrolled under such program;

(4) comply with the terms and conditions of any annual acreage limitation program in effect for the crop acreage bases contracted under the terms of this subsection; and

(5) keep such records as the Secretary may reasonably require.

(d) Acreage. In accepting contracts for the program, the Secretary, to the extent practicable, shall enroll not less than 3,000,000, nor more than 5,000,000, acres of cropland in each of the calendar years 1991 through 1995.

(e) Contracts. The Secretary shall enter into contracts with producers to enroll acreage in the program. Such contracts shall be for a period of not less than 3 years, but may, at the producer’s option, be for a longer period of time (up to 5 years) and may be renewed upon mutual agreement between the Secretary and the producer.

(f) Requirements of plans. Each plan approved by the Secretary shall—

(1) specify the acreage and the crop acreage bases to be enrolled in the program;

(2) describe the resource-conserving crop rotation to be implemented and maintained on such acreage during the contract period to fulfill the purposes of the program;

(3) contain a schedule for the implementation, improvement and maintenance of the resource-conserving crop rotation described in the plan;

(4) describe the farming operations and practices to be implemented on such acreage and how such operations and practices could reasonably be expected to result in—

(A) the maintenance or enhancement of the overall productivity and profitability of the farm;

(B) the prevention of the degradation of farmland soils, the long-term improvement of the fertility and physical properties of such soils; and

(C) the protection of water supplies from contamination by managing or minimizing agricultural pollutants if their management or minimization results in positive economic and environmental benefits;

(5) assist the producer to comply with all Federal, State, and local requirements designed to protect soil, wetland, wildlife habitat, and the quality of groundwater and surface water; and

(6) contain such other terms as the Secretary may, by regulation, require.

(g) Administration; certification; termination

(1) Administration; technical assistance; flexibility; implementation; displacement

(A) Administration. The program shall be administered by the Secretary.

(B) Technical assistance

In administering the program, the Secretary, in consultation with the local conservation districts, and any State or local authorities deemed appropriate by the Secretary, shall provide technical assistance to producers in developing and implementing plans, evaluating the effectiveness of plans, and assessing the costs and benefits of farming operations and practices. The plans may draw on handbooks and technical guides and may also include other practices appropriate to the particular circumstances of the producer and the purposes of the program.

(C) Flexibility

In administering the program, the Secretary shall provide sufficient flexibility for a producer to adjust or modify the producer’s plan consistent with this section, except that such adjustments or modifications must be approved by the Secretary.

(D) Minimization of adverse effect

(i) In general, notwithstanding any other provision of this section, the Secretary shall implement this section in such a manner as to minimize any adverse economic effect on the agribusinesses and other agriculturally related economic interests within any county, State, or region that may result from a decrease of harvested acres due to the operation of this section. In carrying out this section, the Secretary may restrict the total amount of crop acreage that may be removed from production, taking into consideration the total amount of crop acreage that has, or will be, removed from production under other price support, production adjustment, or conservation program activities.

(ii) Maximize conservation goals. The Secretary shall, to the greatest extent practicable, permit producers on a farm that desire to participate in the program authorized under this section to enroll acreage adequate to maximize conservation goals on such farm and ensure economic effectiveness of the program in each individual application.

(E) Displacement. The Secretary shall not approve any plan that will result in the involuntary displacement of farm tenants or lessees by landowners through the removal of substantial portions of the farm from production of a commodity. In the case of any tenant or lessee who has rented or leased the farm (with or without a written option for annual renewal or periodic renewals) for a period of two or more of the immediately preceding years, the Secretary shall consider the refusal by a landlord, without reasonable cause other than simply for the purpose of enrollment in the program, to renew such rental or lease as an involuntary displacement in the absence of a written consent to such nonrenewal by the tenant or lessee.

(2) Certification. The Secretary shall certify compliance by producers with the terms and conditions of the plans.

(3) Termination. The Secretary may terminate a contract entered into with a producer under this program if—

(A) the producer agrees to such termination, or

(B) the producer violates the terms and conditions of such contract.

(h) Program rules

(1) Base and yield protection. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary shall not, except as provided in paragraph (6), reduce crop acreage bases, or farm program payment yields, as a result of the planting of a resource-conserving crop as part of a resource-conserving crop rotation.

(2) Resource-conserving crops on reduced acreage. Notwithstanding the provisions of title I of the Agricultural Act of 1949 [7 U.S.C. 1441 et seq.], acreage devoted to resource-conserving crops as part of a resource-conserving crop rotation under this program may also be designated as conservation use acreage for the purpose of fulfilling any provisions under any acreage limitation or land diversion program and up to 50 percent of the acreage so designated shall be without restrictions on haying and grazing, except as provided in paragraph (5)(B), except that such acreage that is devoted to perennial cover on which cost-share assistance for the establishment of the perennial cover has been provided, shall not be credited towards the producer’s resource-conserving crop requirement under a contract under this section.

(3) Barley, oats, and wheat. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section, barley, oats, or wheat planted as part of a resource-conserving crop on reduced acreage may not be harvested in kernel form.

(4) Payment acres. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Secretary shall not reduce farm program payments of participants in this program as a result of the planting a resource conserving crop as part of a resource-conserving crop rotation on payment acres.

(5) Haying and grazing restriction

(A) In general, the Secretary shall not make any program payments to a producer who is otherwise eligible to receive with respect to acreage enrolled in the program if such producer hays or grazes such acreage (excluding acreage designated as conservation use acreage) during the 5-month period in each State during which haying and grazing of conserving use acres is not allowed under the provisions of the Agricultural Act of 1949 [7 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.], or, if the crop planted on such acreage includes a small grain, before the producer harvests the small grain crop in kernel form.

(B) Limitation on permitted haying and grazing. Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, if the Secretary determines that implementation of this section will result in a significant adverse economic impact on hay or livestock prices in a particular geographic area, the Secretary may limit the quantity of hay that can be harvested or grazed from that area. Such limit may include restrictions on the number of times that hay may be harvested or grazed from the acres per year, the timing of such harvesting and grazing, or the number of years that such land may remain in the same hay stand, or a prohibition on the harvesting or grazing of hay from acres on which a small grain was not originally interplanted with the hay crop and harvested for grain.

(6) Base acre adjustments. The Secretary, only for the purpose of establishing a producer’s crop acreage base under the Agricultural Act of 1949 [7 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.], may make such adjustments as the Secretary determines to be fair and equitable to reflect resource-conserving crop rotation practices that were maintained by producers prior to participation in the program and to reflect such other factors as the Secretary determines should be considered, except that the total of such adjustments in any year shall not exceed the total farm program savings in the same year that would result from the implementation of plans.

(7) Payment acreage limitation

(A) In general. No producers enrolled in a resource-conserving crop rotation shall be eligible to receive payments under farm programs for wheat, feed grains, cotton, or rice under the Agricultural Act of 1949 [7 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.] on acreage equal to the average number of traditionally underplanted acres for the three years prior to enrolling in this program.

(B) ‘‘Traditionally underplanted acreage’’ defined

(i) In general, subject to clause (ii), for the purposes of this paragraph the term ‘‘traditionally underplanted acreage’’ means the difference in a particular year between the acreage that is part of a producer’s crop acreage base that is not planted to the program crop and the part of the crop acreage base subject to an acreage limitation program or required to be set aside, but only to the extent that such number exceeds the number of acres resulting from the reduction in payment acres under an amendment made by section 1101 of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (Public Law 101–508; 104 Stat. 1388–1). In no case shall such acreage be less than zero.

(ii) Exception. In the case of a producer participating in a particular year in a program authorized under section 101B(c)(1)(D), 103B(c)(1)(D), 105B(c)(1)(E), or 107B(c)(1)(E) 1 of the Agricultural Act of 1949, the term ‘‘traditionally underplanted acreage’’ means 8 percent of the producer’s permitted acreage for such year.

**CHAPTER 3— PART C—SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFER PROGRAM — PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

§ 5831. Technical guides and handbooks

(a) Development. Not later than two years after November 28, 1990, the Secretary shall develop and make available handbooks and technical guides, and any other educational materials that are appropriate for describing sustainable agriculture production systems and practices, as researched and developed under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate research programs of the Department.

(b) Consultation and coordination. The Secretary shall develop the handbooks, technical guides, and educational materials in consultation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and any other appropriate entities designated by the Secretary. The Secretary shall coordinate activities conducted under this section with those conducted under section 3861 of title 16.

(c) Topics of handbooks and guides. The handbooks and guides, and other educational materials, shall include detailed information on the selection of crops and crop-plant varieties, rotation practices, soil building practices, tillage systems, nutrient management, integrated pest management practices, habitat protection, pest, weed, and disease management, livestock management, soil, water, and energy conservation, and any other practices in accordance with or in furtherance of the purpose of this subchapter.

(d) Organization and contents. The handbooks and guides, and other educational materials, shall provide practical instructions and be organized in such a manner as to enable agricultural producers desiring to implement the practices and systems developed under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate research programs of the Department to address site-specific, environmental and resource management problems and to sustain farm profitability, including—

(1) enhancing and maintaining the fertility, productivity, and conservation of farmland and ranch soils, ranges, pastures, and wildlife;

(2) maximizing the efficient and effective use of agricultural inputs;

(3) protecting or enhancing the quality of water resources; or

(4) optimizing the use of on-farm and nonrenewable resources.

(e) Availability. The Secretary shall ensure that handbooks and technical guides, and other educational materials are made available to the agricultural community and the public through colleges and universities, the State Cooperative Extension Service, the Soil Conservation Service, other State and Federal agencies, and any other appropriate entities.

(f) Authorization of appropriations. There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this section.

**§ 5832. National Training Program**

(a) In general. The Secretary shall establish a National Training Program in Sustainable Agriculture to provide education and training for Cooperative Extension Service agents and other professionals involved in the education and transfer of technical information concerning sustainable agriculture in order to develop their understanding, competence, and ability to teach and communicate the concepts of sustainable agriculture to Cooperative Extension Service agents and to farmers and urban residents who need information on sustainable agriculture.

(b) Administration. The National Training Program shall be organized and administered by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, in coordination with other appropriate Federal agencies. The Secretary shall designate an individual from the Cooperative Extension Service in each State to coordinate the National Training Program within that State. The coordinators shall be responsible, in cooperation with appropriate Federal and State agencies, for developing and implementing a statewide training program for appropriate field office personnel.

(c) Required training

(1) Agricultural agents. The Secretary shall ensure that all agricultural agents of the Cooperative Extension Service have completed the National Training Program not later than the end of the fiveyear period beginning on November 28, 1990. Such training may occur at a college or university located within each State as designated by the coordinator designated under this section.

(2) Proof of training. Beginning three years after November 28, 1990, the Secretary shall ensure that all new Cooperative Extension Service agents employed by such Service are able to demonstrate, not later than 18 months after the employment of such agents, that such agents have completed the training program established in subsection (a) of this section.

(d) Regional training centers

(1) Designation. The Secretary shall designate not less than two regional training centers to coordinate and administer educational activities in sustainable agriculture as provided for in this section.

(2) Training program. Such centers shall offer intensive instructional programs involving classroom and field training work for extension specialists and other individuals who are required to transmit technical information.

(3) Prohibition on construction. Such centers shall be located at existing facilities, and no funds appropriated to carry out this part shall be used for facility construction.

(4) Administration. Such centers should be administered by entities that have a demonstrated capability relating to sustainable agriculture. The Secretary should consider utilizing existing entities with expertise in sustainable agriculture to assist in the design and implementation of the training program under paragraph (2).

(5) Coordination of resources. Such centers shall make use of information generated by the Department of Agriculture and the State agricultural experiment stations, and the practical experience of farmers, especially those cooperating in on-farm demonstrations and research projects, in carrying out the functions of such centers.

(e) Competitive grants

(1) In general. The Secretary shall establish a competitive grants program to award grants to organizations, including land-grant colleges and universities, to carry out sustainable agricultural training for county agents and other individuals that need basic information concerning sustainable agriculture practices.

(2) Short courses. The purpose of the grants made available under paragraph (1) shall be to establish, in various regions in the United States, training programs that consist of workshops and short courses designed to familiarize participants with the concepts and importance of sustainable agriculture.

(f) Regional specialists. To assist county agents and farmers implement production practices developed under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate research programs of the Department, regional sustainable agriculture specialists may be designated within each State who shall report to the State coordinator of that State. The specialists shall be responsible for developing and coordinating local dissemination of sustainable agriculture information in a manner that is useful to farmers in the region.

(g) Information availability. The Cooperative Extension Service within each State shall transfer information developed under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate research programs of the Department through a program that shall—

(1) assist in developing farmer-to-farmer information exchange networks to enable farmers making transitions to more sustainable farming systems to share ideas and draw on the experiences of other farmers;

(2) help coordinate and publicize a regular series of sustainable agriculture farm tours and field days within each State;

(3) plan for extension programming, including extensive farmer input and feedback, in the design of new and ongoing research endeavors related to sustainable agriculture;

(4) provide technical assistance to individual farmers in the design and implementation of farm management plans and strategies for making a transition to more sustainable agricultural systems;

(5) consult and work closely with the Soil Conservation Service and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service in carrying out the information, technical assistance, and related programs;

(6) develop, coordinate, and direct special education and outreach programs in areas highly susceptible to groundwater contamination, linking sustainable agriculture information with water quality improvement information;

(7) develop information sources relating to crop diversification, alternative crops, onfarm food or commodity processing, and onfarm energy generation;

(8) establish a well-water testing program designed to provide those persons dependent upon underground drinking water supplies with an understanding of the need for regular water testing, information on sources of testing, and an understanding of how to interpret test results and provide for the protection of underground water supplies;

(9) provide specific information on water quality practices developed through the research programs in chapter 86 of this title;

(10) provide specific information on nutrient management practices developed through the research programs in chapter 86 of this title;

and

(11) provide information concerning wholefarm management systems integrating research results under this subchapter, chapter 86 of this title, 1 and other appropriate research programs of the Department.

(h) ‘‘Appropriate field office personnel’’ defined. For purposes of this section, the term ‘‘appropriate field office personnel’’ includes employees of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, and other appropriate Department of Agriculture personnel, as determined by the Secretary, whose activities involve the provision of agricultural production and conservation information to agricultural producers.

(i) Authorization of appropriations. There are authorized to be appropriated $20,000,000 for each fiscal year to carry out the National Training Program.

**NCR-SARE Acronym Key**

AC – Administrative Council

AFSIC – Alternative Farming Systems Information Center

ARS – USDA Agricultural Research Service

ATTRA – National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service

CFP – Call for Proposals

CFPP – Call for Preproposals

EPA – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

FNC – Identifier for NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher program grant projects

FRG – Farmer Rancher Grant Program

GNC – Identifier for NCR-SARE Graduate Student grant projects

GSP – Graduate Student Grant Program

IPM – Integrated Pest Management

LNC – Identifier for NCR-SARE Research and Education (R&E) grant projects

NAL – National Agriculture Library

NCAT – National Center for Appropriate Technology

NCR-SARE – North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and

  Education Program

NIFA – National Institute of Food and Agriculture (formerly CSREES)

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRI – National Research Initiative; the main NIFA research program; renamed AFRI – (the Ag and Food Research Initiative) in the Farm Bill passed in 2008.

ONC – Identifier for NCR-SARE Partnership grant projects

PDP – Professional Development Program

POW – State Plan of Work

R&E – Research and Education Grant Program

SARE – Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education

SC – State Coordinators

TC – Technical Committee

USDA– U.S. Department of Agriculture

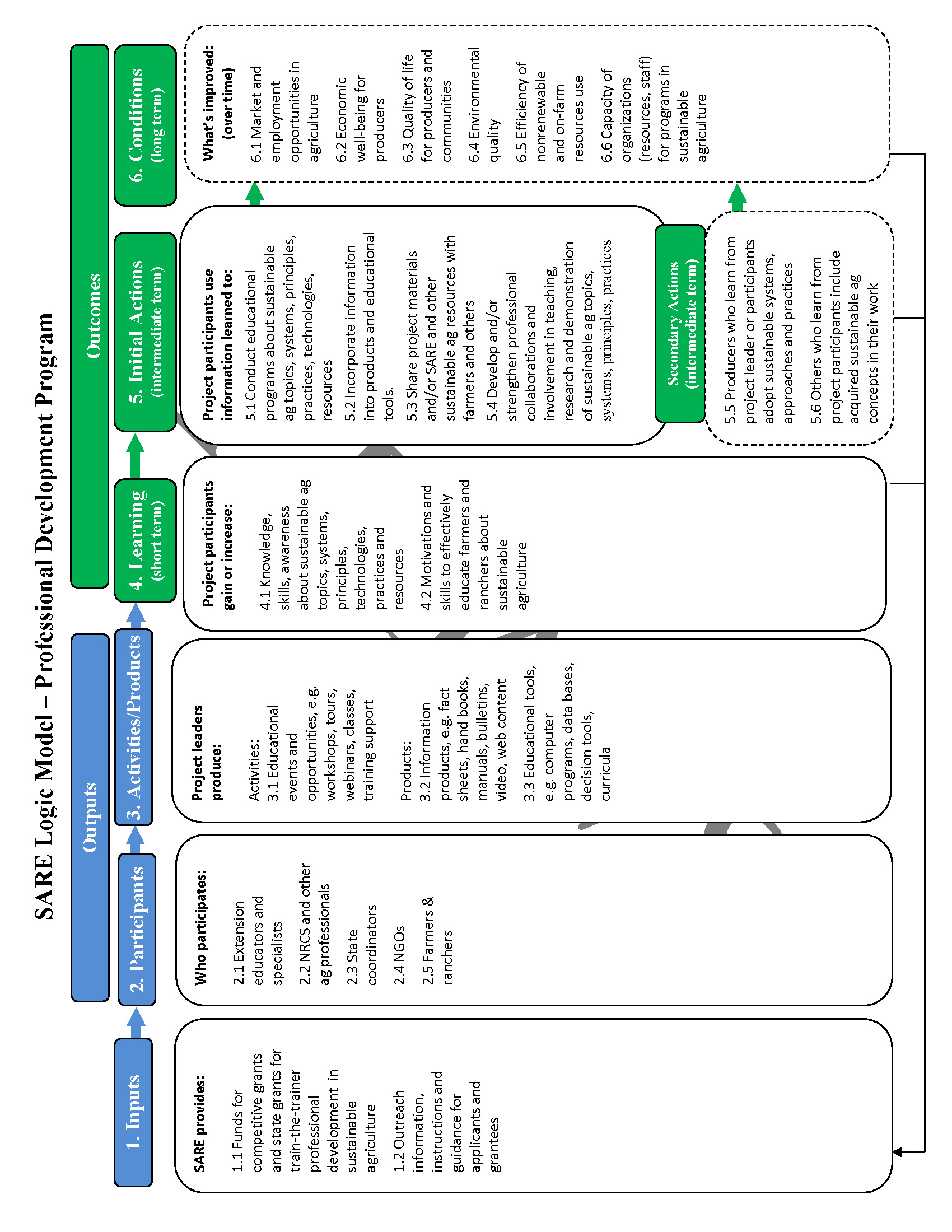
YENC – Identifier for NCR-SARE Youth Educator grant projects

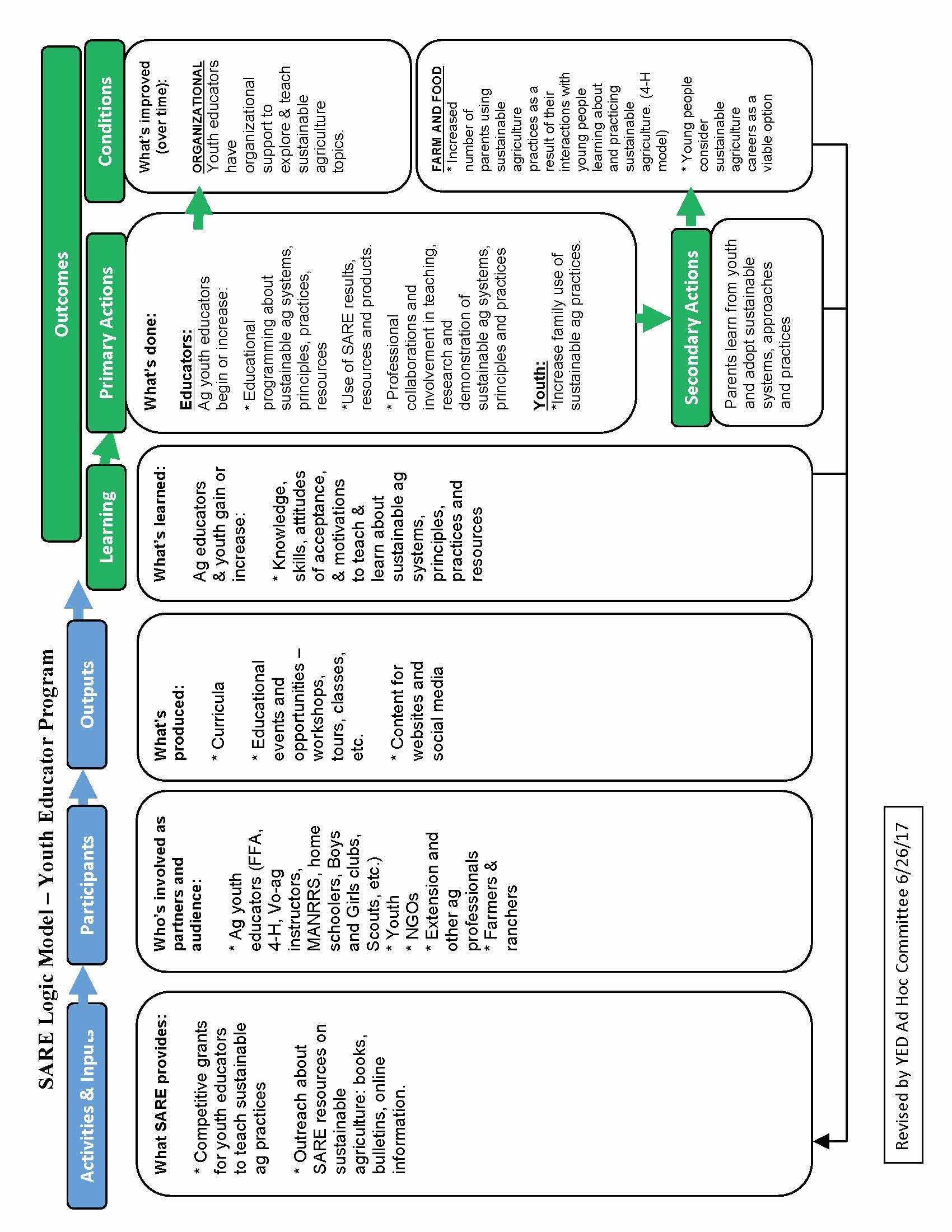
**NCR-SARE Organizational chart**

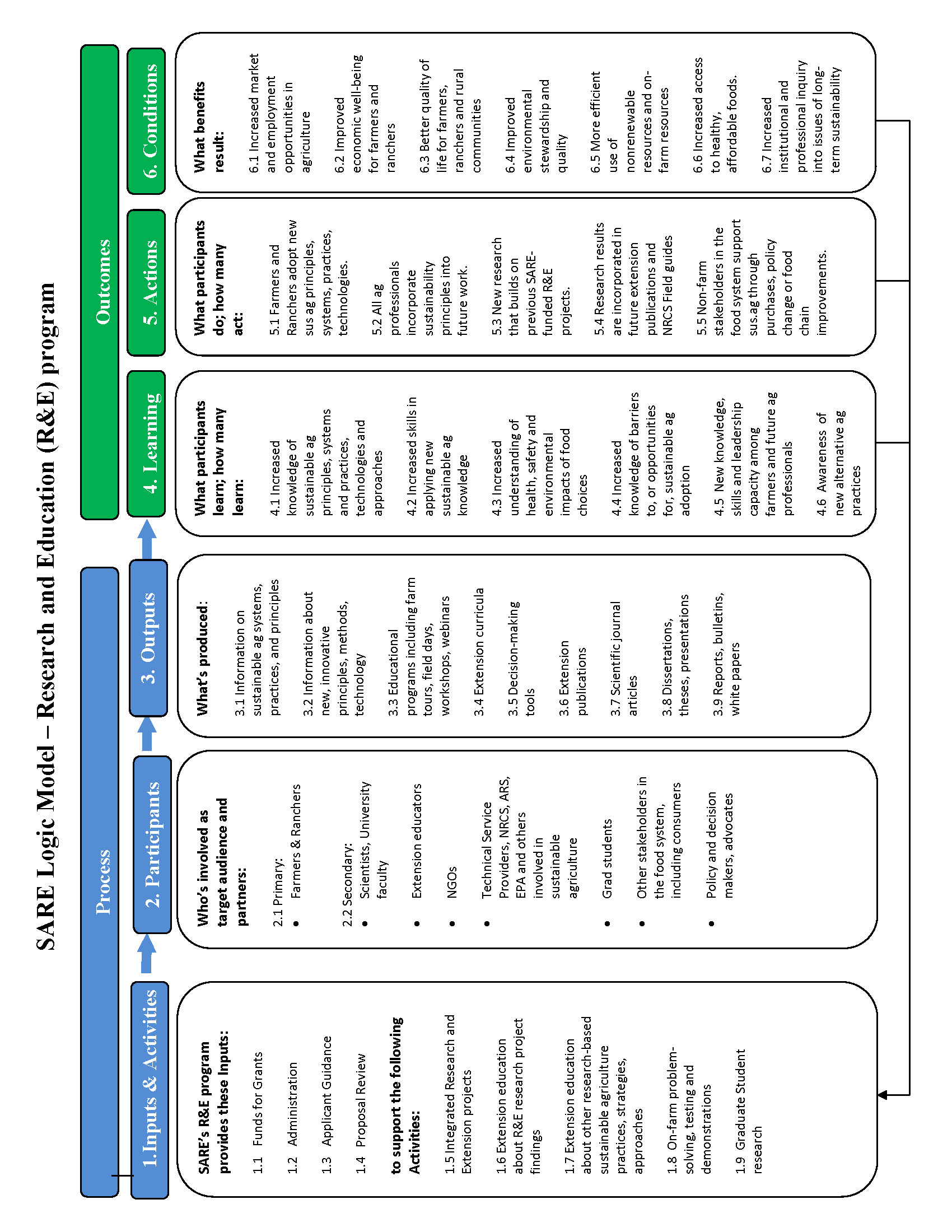
A diagram of a company

Description automatically generated

* Andreasen, Brownlee, Flanagan, Nelson, Schneider, and Wieland are employed and located at the U of MN, St Paul
* Larson is with NCR-SARE part-time, with employment by the Food Finance Institute
* Myers is employed by the U of MO in Columbia, Missouri

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**APPENDIX A**

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

for the

SARE PROGRAM

Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education

Authorized in

Subtitle B, Chapter XVI

Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990

Amended in

Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996

And

Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008

And

Agricultural Act of 2014

National Institute of Food and Agriculture

United States Department of Agriculture

Washington DC, 20250-2200

Revised 9 March 2021

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**OVERVIEW**

**Background**

The program that is now known as Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) was first authorized as Low-Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) in the Food Security Act of 1985. Implementation was begun in 1988 when Congress first appropriated funds for the program.

In 1990, LISA was changed to SARE upon enactment of Title XVI of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA). Subtitle B of Title XVI authorized research and education programs in Sustainable Agriculture under three chapters. Chapter 1 (“Best Utilization of Biological Applications”) authorized the overall program structure of regional Administrative Councils (AC) and host institutions, and competitive grants for research and extension. It also authorized a Federal-State matching grant program (7USC 5813) which has not yet been funded nor implemented. Chapter 2 authorized a program of integrated resource management which has never been funded nor implemented, and is not addressed in these guidelines. Chapter 3 (“Sustainable Agriculture Technology Development and Transfer Program”) authorized Technical Guides and Handbooks that are produced by SARE Outreach, and a National Training Program that has been implemented as the SARE Professional Development Program (PDP).

The United States Code, Title 7, sections 5801 to 5832, contain the SARE statutory language (<http://uscode.house.gov/browse/prelim@title7/chapter88/subchapter1&edition=prelim>).

Part A, sections 5811-5814, contains the Research and Extension (R&E) provisions often referred to as “Chapter 1.” Part C, sections 5831 and 5832, contains the provisions for publication of technical guides and handbooks and the PDP program often referred to as “Chapter 3.” References in this document in the form of “(7 USC xx)” refer to this code.

As a program of USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), SARE adheres to regulations and procedures relevant to the agency and USDA, most notably the Uniform Guidance, (2CFR 200 - UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL AWARDS) which specifies procedures for grants and cooperative agreements.

The purpose of these guidelines is to be a reference to describe program requirements as well as procedures which have evolved to help operate the program. They do not supersede any statutory or regulatory requirements. These guidelines are meant to replace previous versions of the guidelines.

**Definition and Purpose**

Sustainable agriculture is defined (7 USC 3103(19)) as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term:

1. satisfy human food and fiber needs;
2. enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends;
3. make the most efficient use of non-renewable and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls;
4. sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and
5. enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

The purpose of the SARE program (7USC 5801(a)) is to encourage research designed to increase our knowledge concerning agricultural production systems that:

1. maintain and enhance the quality and productivity of the soil;
2. conserve soil, water, energy, natural resources, and fish and wildlife habitat;
3. maintain and enhance the quality of surface and ground water;
4. protect the health and safety of persons involved in the food and farm system;
5. promote the well-being of animals;
6. increase employment opportunities in agriculture.

**Operating Principles**

These Operational Guidelines outline a coordinated process for administering Chapter 1 (R&E; 7 USC 5811-14) and Chapter 3 (PDP; 7 USC 5831-5832) in a manner that makes the results of research programs available to the entire United States agricultural and food community.

These guidelines are based on the principle that the goals of sustainable agriculture will be most effectively attained through regional mechanisms that include a diversity of committees, programs, projects and participants. The guidelines provide for involvement of public and private sectors in a coordinated multi-organizational management plan. The management plan is designed to enhance partnerships among farmers and ranchers, non-profit organizations, agribusiness, academia, and Federal and state government, resulting in productive agricultural systems that are socially, economically, and environmentally sound.

**Regional Innovation in Program Delivery**

The regional structure of SARE fosters place-based creativity for the development and implementation of grants and other program activities, within the guidelines established by the authorizing legislation. While fulfilling the primary goals of the national program, each region can develop unique approaches that are customized to meet the needs of its people, landscape, and agricultural enterprises. These approaches may or may not be adopted by other regions, depending on their efficacy and applicability. Regional innovation and cross-region communication strengthen the SARE program by developing effective ‘best management practices’ derived from making grants and delivering information to diverse audiences across a wide variety of locations and contexts.

**Management Structure**

The SARE program is a national program that is implemented regionally. It is managed cooperatively by USDA-NIFA in conjunction with a regional AC, a host institution, a regional R&E coordinator (RC), and a regional PDP coordinator (RCPDP) in each of four regions. The program also includes PDP coordinators in each state, also known as State Coordinators.

**USDA-NIFA Responsibilities** (7 USC 5812(a))

The USDA responsibilities are conducted by NIFA on behalf of the Secretary of Agriculture. The National Program Leader for Sustainable Agriculture in NIFA serves as the SARE Director. The program has a regional structure (7 USC 5812(a)(2)) wherein USDA shall establish a minimum of four regional ACs. ACs have been established in the North Central, Northeast, South, and Western regions. At its discretion, USDA may establish additional regional ACs.

USDA shall, in conjunction with these regional ACs, identify the regional host institutions required to carry out the program and projects. NIFA also maintains a cooperative agreement for a National Reporting, Coordination, and Communications Office (NRCCO).

NIFA works through the regional host institutions to implement the PDP program. The host institutions contract with the RCPDP’s home organization to provide leadership and oversight of the PDP activities in their regions.

Operations Committee:­ The NIFA SARE Director chairs the Operations Committee which oversees national activities, facilitates program implementation, and promotes cross regional sharing in consultation with other Federal agencies. The purpose of the Operations Committee is to allocate annual funding among the regional and national activities, to share information about program activities in each region, and to coordinate policies, procedures, and communications across and among regions. The Operations Committee convenes twice yearly, either in person or by virtual meeting. Voting members include the four RCs, the four RCPDPs, the four AC Chairs, the National SARE Director or alternative NIFA representative, and one representative from each of the following: USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and an 1890 institution. Voting members may be represented by designees with prior notification and approval of the NIFA SARE Director.

**REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCILS**

The enabling legislation requires a minimum of four Regional ACs and specifies the core membership and responsibilities for these councils.

**AC Membership**

The Regional AC membership is specified by the enabling legislation (7 USC 5812(b)(1)). Thus, each Regional AC is required to include the following representation:

* 1. Agricultural Research Service
  2. NIFA
  3. State Cooperative Extension Services
  4. State Agricultural Experiment Station
  5. Natural Resources Conservation Service
  6. State Departments engaged in sustainable agriculture programs
  7. Nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise
  8. Farmers using systems and practices of sustainable agriculture
  9. Agribusiness
  10. State or United States Geological Survey
  11. Other persons knowledgeable about sustainable agriculture and its impact on the environment and rural communities.

The original list included several Federal organizations that have since consolidated or changed names. Each region, with concurrence from NIFA, may choose to add additional representatives to their council. For example, each region now includes a representative from the Environmental Protection Agency and has expanded their Regional AC beyond the required representation to be inclusive of additional perspectives such as rural sociology, additional producer representatives, or minority serving institutions.

In concurrence with NIFA, the ACs established by USDA are to be primarily self-sustaining with the requirements that each AC has and follows specific membership nomination processes, specific term lengths and limits, and that opportunities for nominations for any open position on the AC are widely and appropriately publicized.

**AC Responsibilities** **(7 USC 5812(b)(2))**

The regional ACs work in conjunction with the regional host institution and NIFA. The ACs are responsible for guiding the regional implementation of the SARE program including allocating resources among project types and evaluating and selecting individual proposals for funding. The specific responsibilities of the ACs are:

1. Promote the SARE program at the regional level
2. Establish goals and criteria for the selection of projects within the applicable region
3. Appoint a Technical Committee (TC) to evaluate proposals to be considered by the AC
4. Review and act upon the recommendations of the TC and coordinate its activities with the regional host institution
5. Prepare and make available an annual report concerning regional activities in sustainable agriculture together with an evaluation of the project activity.

In practice the regional ACs have found that the TCs provide a very good opportunity to orient potential AC members to the function and demands of the AC. For this reason it is advisable that the opportunity to serve on the TC also be widely and appropriately publicized.

The regional ACs may also coordinate with NIFA to review both the R&E and the PDP programs (see Appendix A) to determine if performance expectations are being met.

**REGIONAL HOST INSTITUTIONS**

The regional host institutions have the operational responsibility to conduct competitive grants programs and other activities on behalf of NIFA and their AC. Each regional host institution employs a RC and employs or contracts with other persons as necessary to carry out the responsibilities of the program.

**Host Institution Responsibilities**

The regional host institutions, through the RC, convene AC meetings and provide staff support to implement the SARE program in each region. They enter into cooperative agreements with NIFA to carry out the competitive grants programs and other activities specified by the AC, including the awarding and oversight of sub-awards to grant recipients.

Cooperative Agreements with NIFA: Cooperative agreements are awarded to the host institutions based on proposals submitted to NIFA in response to a Request for Applications (RFA) that NIFA publishes each year based on the program’s actual or anticipated annual appropriations. These cooperative agreements are subject to the requirements of the Uniform Guidance (2CFR 200 - UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS FOR FEDERAL AWARDS) and the terms and conditions of the NIFA Awards Management Division (AMD). The cooperative agreements and grants include “streamline” provisions for most SARE regional programs such that the process of soliciting, reviewing, and selecting proposals and administering sub-awards may be conducted at the regional level rather than being done directly by NIFA.

Streamlining Agreements: Cooperative agreements are awarded annually by NIFA as new agreements with a maximum 5-year time period. Cooperative agreement proposals submitted in response to the annual RFA should include a Regional administrative budget and budget justification and a list of all AC members including their term and year in that term. Each competitive grant sub-award program (e.g. Research and Education Grants, Producer Grants, and PDP) should include budgeted amounts, call(s) for proposals, a description of the technical review process, and a list of technical reviewers. It should also include work plans and budget justifications for any projects or activities awarded non-competitively. After AC approval of the projects for the “streamlined” competitive grant programs, a list of the funded projects should be sent to NIFA in the subsequent year’s proposal.

**The Professional Development Program (PDP)**

As part of the cooperative agreement with NIFA, the regional host institutions currently contract with the RCPDP’s home organizations to provide leadership and oversight of the PDP activities in their regions.

Although the National Training Program created in Chapter 3 (7USC 5832) does not stipulate any AC authority for the PDP program, NIFA has implemented the program by working through the regional host institutions with guidance by the regional ACs so that the PDP is implemented as an integral component of the regional SARE program.

Funding for the PDP (Chapter 3) activities used to come as a single appropriations line, separate from the R&E (Chapter 1) activities. In 2014, funding for the two programs was combined into a single appropriations line under R&E. The 2014 and all subsequent annual appropriations have included the stipulation that NIFA continue both program activities. The 75%/25% ratio between the Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 activities in 2014 is an appropriate target ratio to maintain.

**Replacing Host Institutions**

As the sponsoring agency for the SARE program, NIFA will periodically require, a competition for the host institution. NIFA held an open competition in 2018, the first since the program’s inception, for the opportunity to serve as a regional host institution for five years (2018-2023). Since this was the first competition for host institutions, further details about the process used in 2018 are provided in Appendix D.

Based on the experience in 2018, the process outlined below will be used to select a host institution when NIFA requires a competition to occur, if NIFA in conjunction with the regional AC determines that a new host institution is needed, or if the current host institution decides to relinquish its role.

1. NIFA, in cooperation with the AC, will initiate an open competition for a host institution within the region (or as part of a process of competing all four regional host institutions). Any organization that meets the eligibility requirements and can demonstrate the capacity to fulfill NIFA’s program management requirements can submit proposals.
2. As with the 2018 RFA, NIFA will solicit stakeholder input prior to releasing an RFA to select the host institutions. The RFA will describe the application requirements, the rating criteria, and the selection process that would include coordinated reviews by both the ACs and NIFA. At a minimum, a host institution proposal must include the name and qualifications of the proposed RC and RCPDP, a management plan for the program, and a detailed transition plan, along with any other information requested by the AC or NIFA.
3. Completed applications will be shared with the appropriate regional ACs to be rated independently by each council member followed by a discussion by the full AC to create a collective rating. (Note: members of the ACs are expected to abide by NIFA confidentiality requirements in relation to proposal evaluations). All individual AC member comments as well as the summary of the full AC discussion for each proposal will be packaged for review by an expert peer review panel convened by NIFA. NIFA’s expert panel will follow established procedures, with selection of an external panel manager and other highly qualified reviewers. The panel members will review and rate each application independently, review AC comments, and convene as a full panel to discuss and rank all proposals received for each of the four regions.
4. The AC and the NIFA expert panel will collectively identify up to three applicants from each region to interview. Both the AC and the NIFA expert panel will participate in the virtual interviews in a manner that will not disclose the identity of the NIFA expert panel members. A summary of the AC’s discussion of each interview will be shared with the NIFA expert panel. The expert panel will discuss the interviews, give a final ranking, and make a recommendation to NIFA’s SARE Director about which applicant to select in each region.
5. Based on the proposal reviews, interviews, and recommendation from the expert panel, the NIFA SARE Director, in cooperation with the AC, will make a recommendation to NIFA leadership regarding selection of a host institution.
6. If a change is made in the host institution, the newly appointed host institution will assure sufficient overlap with the outgoing host institution, as well as the PDP organization, to maintain program integrity.

**Replacing the Regional Coordinator**

When the RC resigns by choice or at the request of the AC following a formal review process, NIFA, in conjunction with the AC, shall work with the host institution to solicit candidates internally or through an external search, or to initiate a search for a new host institution. Searches for a new RC will be conducted in a manner that is in line with the host institution’s HR policies.

The Dean/Director at the current host institution may first seek one or more internal candidates to be screened by a search committee which should include the NIFA SARE director and one or more AC members. If no internal applications are put forward or none of the internal candidates are acceptable to NIFA and the AC, the Dean/Director shall form a new search committee and conduct a national search following the host institution’s HR policies. This committee shall include the same representation as described above and may or may not include members from the original committee.

If one of the candidates, either from the host institution or a national search, is acceptable to NIFA and the AC, the host institution should strive for sufficient overlap between the appointments of the incoming and outgoing RCs to maintain program continuity.

If neither search process for a new RC (at the current host institution or through a national search) is successful, a search for a new host institution and RC may be initiated and the search for a new host institution will follow the established process for competitive selection of host institutions.

**Replacing the Regional PDP Coordinator**

When a RCPDP resigns by choice or at the request of the AC following a formal review process, the RC, in conjunction with the AC, will initiate the search for a replacement and include the chair of the AC, the RC, NIFA’s SARE Director, and, if desired, other members of the AC in the selection process. In situations where there is more than one RCPDP in a region, the search may be to replace the responsibilities of just the resigning coordinator. The position should be advertised at the regional or national level, and the applicants should identify an institution within the region that will be willing to host them and include a letter of support from that institution in their application package.

**Qualifications for the RC and the RCPDP**

The RC and the RCPDP must have a demonstrated understanding of sustainable agriculture principles and practices. They must also have significant professional experience in the area of sustainable agriculture, as an educator, researcher, and/or administrator. They must be committed to engaging with a diversity of views and be able to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders. They must have strong organizational and people management skills. They must be employed by a college, university, or other non-profit institution with an educational and/or scientific mission related to agriculture. The institution where the RC works must have demonstrated capacity to serve as the fiscal agent for the regional program including management of a large number of subawards. They should be respected members of their institution and professional community. PDP coordinators must have a strong record of effective outreach in the agricultural community.

**Miscellaneous**

Indirect Costs: The allowable indirect cost rate is specified in the annual appropriations bill.

No-Cost Extensions – By convention SARE cooperative agreements are now written for five years. No extension can be granted beyond five years from the initial starting date.

Sub-Awards: The host institution must supply the same Terms and Conditions to the sub-awards that are issued under the cooperative agreements. The host institution may include additional requirements providing that all NIFA requirements remain in place.

For additional information and interpretation regarding terms and conditions and Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations, contact Mark Heap (816-926-7019; [Mark.Heap@usda.gov](mailto:Mark.Heap@usda.gov)) or Janette Jensen (816-926-2629; [Janette.Jensen@usda.gov](mailto:Janette.Jensen@usda.gov)) who are with NIFA’s Awards Management Division (AMD). Copy emails to [awards@nifa.usda.gov](mailto:awards@nifa.usda.gov).

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY**

The authorizing legislation states that a member of the AC or the TC may not participate in the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects if the member has or had a professional or business interest in, including the provision of consultancy services, the organization whose grant application is under review (7 USC 5812(b)(3)). At a minimum, each region’s Conflict of Interest (COI) policy should align with that used by NIFA’s Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) although a more stringent policy can be adopted by individual ACs if desired.

To avoid any COI, a member of the AC, TC, any AC appointed committees or panels, or staff may not review or participate in the discussion or recommendation regarding any competitive grant proposal with any of the following characteristics:

1. From that member’s institution or organization;
2. From institutions or organizations for which he/she acts as a paid consultant, or board member;
3. From applicants for whom he/she has served as a thesis advisor (or advisee) or postdoctoral advisor (or advisee); for thesis committee members the restriction is three years from the time the degree was awarded;
4. From applicants with whom he/she has served as a collaborator on a research proposal or publication within the past three years;
5. From applicants for whom he/she has acted as a paid consultant within the past three years;
6. From applicants for whom he/she will be a project participant during the current grant cycle;

In addition:

1. The members of the AC, TC, OC, any AC-appointed committees or panels, or regional and national staff may not be listed as participants on competitive grant proposals under consideration by the committee or panel on which the person serves when they could potentially gain monetary benefits to themselves or their program (benefits do not mean compensation for travel or per diem);
2. The statement applies to current members. Those wanting to submit proposals must resign their memberships.

Process:

1. During the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects, any members with a conflict of interest must leave the room. This applies to the regional coordinators and senior staff.
2. Discussion and recommendations should involve individual projects. When a large slate of projects (for example the farmer grants) is being voted upon -- and individual projects are not being discussed -- members with a conflict of interest do not need to leave the room.

**RESEARCH AND EDUCATION GUIDELINES** **(Chapter 1)**

**Purpose and Scope**

Under Chapter 1 (7 USC 5811), USDA is to enter into agreements to conduct research and extension projects to obtain data, develop conclusions, demonstrate technologies, and conduct educational activities that promote the following purposes:

1. Facilitate and increase scientific investigation and education in order to:
   1. reduce to the extent feasible and practicable, the use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, and toxic natural materials in agricultural production;
   2. improve low-input farm/ranch management to enhance agricultural productivity, profitability, and competitiveness; and
   3. promote crop, livestock, and enterprise diversification; and
2. Facilitate the conduct of projects in order to:
   1. study, to the extent practicable, agricultural production systems that are located in areas that possess various soil, climate, and physical characteristics;
   2. study farms and ranches that have been, and will continue to be, managed using farm production practices that rely on low-input and conservation practices;
   3. take advantage of the experience and expertise of farmers and ranchers through their direct participation and leadership in projects;
   4. transfer practical, reliable and timely information to farmers and ranchers concerning low-input sustainable farming practices and systems: and
   5. promote a partnership between farmers/ranchers, nonprofit organizations, agribusiness, and public and private research and extension institutions.

SARE projects conducted under Chapter 1 should include activities that represent the full diversity of United States agriculture including production on family farms, mixed crop and livestock farms, and dairy operations. The projects may involve on-farm research and demonstration activities. Impact studies on national and regional economies, global competitiveness, and the social, economic, and environmental implications of the adoption of low-input sustainable agriculture practices and systems are also encouraged. (7 USC 5811(d), (e), (f))

**Eligibility**

Chapter 1 projects will be implemented through agreements by USDA-NIFA with land-grant colleges or universities, other universities, State agricultural experiment stations, State cooperative extension services, nonprofit organizations with demonstrable expertise, and Federal or State government entities. (7 USC 5811(b)) Regional host institutions may make sub-awards to these and other appropriate recipients, such as farmers and ranchers.

**Criteria for Evaluation of Projects**

Priority for funding projects under Chapter 1 will be based on needs and opportunities identified by the Regional ACs. Project selection (7 USC 5811(c)(1)) should be on the basis of:

1. relevance of the project to the purposes of the program;
2. appropriateness of the design of the project;
3. likelihood of obtaining the objectives of the project; and
4. national or regional applicability of the findings and outcomes of the project.

Priority should be given (7 USC 5811(c)(2)) to projects that:

1. closely coordinate research and extension activities;
2. indicate how findings will be made readily usable by farmers/ranchers and other intended audiences;
3. maximize the involvement and cooperation of farmers/ranchers including projects involving on-farm research and demonstration;
4. use an inter-disciplinary systems approach; and
5. involve cooperation between farms/ranches, non-profit organizations, colleges and universities, and government agencies.

Proposal application and evaluation procedures are developed by each AC, subject to review and approval by NIFA. These procedures vary among the regions and by the type of project being considered.

**Duration of Projects**

Activities authorized under Chapter 1 may be funded for more than one fiscal year. The duration of each project should be appropriate to the question being studied, with adequate oversight to ensure that progress is being made toward project goals. In the case of projects requiring planting of a sequence of crops, the project duration should be appropriate for the crop rotation. (7 USC 5811(g)) Since individual projects are constrained by the 5-year limit on cooperative agreements, projects with longer rotations may be conducted as separate consecutive projects, each subject to the competitive grant process under the applicable cooperative agreement.

**Public Access and Indemnification**

Research projects conducted under this section should be open for public observation at specified times. (7 USC 5811(h)). The Secretary may indemnify the operator of a project for damage incurred or undue losses sustained as a result of a rigid requirement of research or demonstration under such project that is not experienced in normal farming operations. (7 USC 5811 (i)(1)) Such an indemnity payment shall be subject to any agreement between a project grantee and operator entered into prior to the initiation of such project. (7 USC 5811 (i)(2))

**Program Funding**

An annual appropriation of $40,000,000 is authorized (7 USC 5814) for implementation of Chapter 1. When Chapter 1 (7USC 5811 through 5814) funding exceeds $15,000,000, funding can be used for the Federal-State Matching Grant program (7USC 5813), provided that the greater of $15,000,000 or two thirds of the total is reserved for the other sections in Chapter 1.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM GUIDELINES (Chapter 3)**

**Purpose and Scope**

The Sustainable Agriculture Technology Development and Transfer Program has two key parts. One is the production of technical guides and handbooks which is done by SARE Outreach. The other is a National Training Program, known as the Professional Development Program, or PDP. The PDP is a train-the-trainer program designed to provide education and training for extension agents and other professionals involved in education and transfer of technical information. It is intended to develop their understanding, competence and ability to teach other extension agents, farmers, and urban residents about sustainable agriculture.

The components of the Chapter include:

1. Technical Guides and Handbooks (7USC 5831)
2. National Training Program (7USC 5832)
   1. Regional Training Centers (7USC 5832(d))
   2. Competitive grants (7USC 5832(e))
   3. Regional Specialists (7USC 5832(f))
   4. Information Dissemination (7USC 5832(g))

**Technical Guides and Handbooks**(7USC 5831)

Chapter 3 authorizes the development of technical guides, handbooks, and other educational materials describing sustainable agriculture production systems and practices, as researched and developed under SARE, water quality, and other appropriate research programs at the USDA. It directs USDA to ensure these materials are widely available to the agricultural community and the public through colleges and universities, Cooperative Extension, Natural Resources Conservation Service, other state and federal agencies and any other appropriate entities.

The development of the technical guides, handbooks and educational materials is to be directed by NIFA in consultation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and other appropriate entities. In practice, this component is performed by SARE Outreach under a grant from NIFA to the University of Maryland.

This effort is intended to be supportive of other USDA activities in areas such as integrated pest management, water quality, wetlands, wildlife, etc. The handbooks and guides, and other educational materials, will be designed to provide practical instructions, and be organized in a way that enables agricultural producers to adopt sustainable agriculture practices and systems, to address site specific environmental and resource management issues and to sustain farm and ranch profitability. Topics to be addressed include:

1. enhancing and maintaining the fertility, productivity and conservation of farmland and ranch soils, ranges, pastures, and wildlife;
2. attaining efficient and effective use of agricultural inputs;
3. protecting or enhancing the quality of water resources; and
4. optimizing the use of on-farm/ranch and nonrenewable resources.

Program Funding: The enabling legislation (7USC 5831(f)) authorizes “such sums as may be necessary” for the development of these handbooks and guides. Prior to 2014 annual funding for this activity was included with funding for the National Training Program (i.e. PDP) in a single appropriations line item for sustainable agriculture program extension activities. Funding for the R&E activities and the Extension activities used to come as two separate appropriations lines which were combined into one line under R&E in 2014. The 2014 and all subsequent annual appropriations legislation has included the stipulation that NIFA continue both program activities. The 75%/25% ratio between the Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 activities in 2014 is the appropriate target ratio to maintain. The allocation of this single funding line between the R&E Program, SARE Outreach for Handbooks and Guides, and the PDP National Training Program is determined annually by the Operations Committee.

**National Training Program**

A National Training Program in Sustainable Agriculture is to be organized and administered by NIFA in cooperation with other appropriate Federal Agencies (7 USC 5832(a&b)). Training will be available for Cooperative Extension Service agents, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency staff, and other professionals involved in the education and transfer of technical information concerning sustainable agriculture. The purpose of the training is to develop the trainees understanding, competence, and ability to teach concepts of sustainable agriculture to Cooperative Extension Service agents, farmers, and urban residents who need information on sustainable agriculture. All agricultural Extension staff are to have completed this training and new staff must receive training in sustainable agriculture within 18 months from their date of employment.

Training in sustainable agriculture should incorporate proven adult education methods and practices, including the development of national and regional curriculum-based educational materials designed to lead toward the successful integration of methods and practices that enhance development of sustainable systems. Producers’ (farmers and ranchers) knowledge, expertise, and experiences shall be a fundamental element of curriculum development and delivery. Regional training programs involving intensive classroom and field training will be available for Extension specialists, county, district, and area staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service field staff, and other professionals (including agribusiness representatives and the financial community.)

State or multi-state short courses, workshops, and educational opportunities will be used to provide emphasis on specific localized applications and problems. Curriculum-based programs will also be made available through video, satellite, internet, teleconference, and social media.

***Regional Training Centers (Consortia)***

The legislation authorizes not less than two regional training centers (7 USC 5832(d)(1)) to coordinate and administer educational activities in sustainable agriculture. The regional centers are implemented in the four SARE regions through sub-awards from the host institution and led by RCPDPs. The RCPDP is responsible for development and implementation of PDP programs throughout the Region. The RCPDP works in close cooperation with the RC and with guidance from the regional AC.

The regional PDP consortia offer intensive educational programs involving classroom and field training for extension specialists and other individuals required to extend technical information. The centers/consortia are located at existing facilities and administered by organizations with demonstrated capability in sustainable agriculture. No funds appropriated for this program shall be used for facility construction (7 USC 5832(d)(3)).

***Competitive Grants***

A Competitive Grants Program is authorized under Chapter 3 (7 USC 5832 (e)) to make awards to organizations, including Land-Grant colleges and universities, to carry out sustainable agriculture training for county Extension staff and other individuals, including the general public**,** that need basic information about sustainable agricultural practices. The purpose of the grant program is to make short courses and workshops in sustainable agriculture available in various regions of the United States. These educational programs must be designed to familiarize participants with the concepts and importance of sustainable agriculture.

***State Coordinators and Resource Specialists***

The program requires designation of an individual from the Cooperative Extension Service in each state to coordinate the National Training Program within that State (7 USC 5832(b)). In practice, the Extension Deans/Directors work with the RCPDP to designate the State PDP Coordinator to fulfill these responsibilities (Appendix C). State means each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Virgin Islands of the United States, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or federally recognized Indian tribes (7 USC 5801).

State Resource (District, Area, Multicounty) Specialists in Sustainable Agriculture may be designated to assist county agents and farmers/ranchers in implementing production practices developed under SARE and other appropriate programs. The Specialists will report to their State PDP Coordinator. The Specialists will be responsible for developing and coordinating local dissemination of sustainable agriculture information in a manner that is useful to the farmers/ranchers of the region. (7 USC 5832 (f))

***Information Dissemination***(7 USC 5832 (g))

The Cooperative Extension Service within each state shall transfer information developed under this subtitle, and other appropriate research programs of the Department through a program that shall:

1. Assist in developing farmer to farmer networks
2. Help coordinate farm tours and field days
3. Plan for Extension programming with farmer input
4. Provide technical assistance
5. Consult closely with NRCS
6. Develop educational and outreach programs for groundwater protection
7. Develop information sources relating to crop diversification, alternative crops, on-farm processing, and on-farm energy generation
8. Establish a program to educate people about well-water testing
9. Provide information on water quality practices, nutrient management, and whole farm management systems developed through SARE research grants and other USDA programs.
10. Provide information on nutrient management practices
11. Provide information concerning whole farm management systems based on research performed through SARE and other USDA research programs.

***Program Funding***

An appropriation of $20,000,000 is authorized for the National Training Program ((7 USC 5832)). Prior to 2014 annual funding for this activity was included with funding for the Technical Guides and Handbooks in a single appropriations line item for sustainable agriculture program extension activities. Funding for the R&E activities and the Extension activities used to come as two separate appropriations lines which were combined into one line under R&E in 2014. The 2014 and all subsequent annual appropriations legislation has included the stipulation that NIFA continue both program activities. The 75%/25% ratio between the Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 activities in 2014 is an appropriate target ratio to maintain. The allocation of this single funding line at the national level between the R&E Program, SARE Outreach for Handbooks and Guides and the PDP National Training Program is determined annually by the Operations Committee.

**Appendix A. Host Institution Review (Research and Education and Professional Development Program)**

Prior to the host institution competition in 2018 the SARE ACs were required to review their host institutions at least every five years to determine if the following performance expectations were being met. This survey instrument may be used as the foundation for interim host institution reviews if desired by NIFA and/or the AC.

Staff Responsibilities­

1. Management of AC
   1. Meetings – planning and conducting
   2. Committees – provide logistical support
   3. Solicitation and nomination of new members
2. Management of Grants Process
   1. Solicitation of proposals – produce and distribute calls for proposals
   2. Facilitation of review process (comprehensive and fair)
3. Administration of the Grant Awards
   1. Coordinate and communicate with NIFA regarding cooperative agreement
   2. Communication with sponsored program office
   3. Communication with grant recipients
   4. Account management, develop budgets and track project expenditures
   5. Maintain program files and records
4. Administration of Outreach
   1. Publicize project results and information products

Host institutions provide administrative support and services to enable the SARE regional staff to perform the day-to-day functions described above. The following services are critical to the function of the regional SARE staff and will be part of the host institution review.

1. Sponsored Program Office – processing of awards and subawards
2. Accounts Payable – payment of invoices
3. Facilities – condition of equipment and facilities
4. Professional development and training

Staff Review

Staff reviews are conducted by the regional staff member’s employer as part of the employee performance process. The AC has no formal oversight of university human resources issues or fiscal procedures but can and do monitor if those things are being handled in a satisfactory manner through host institution reviews.

Grant Application Process – to be conducted outside of the host institution review

1. Funding opportunity information
2. Application process
3. Application status
4. Staff interactions
5. Post project assessment – to cover things like reporting

The national staff will work with the regional executive committees to conduct the host institution review using the baseline questions below.

Administrative Council Survey

1. Meetings - Planning and Conducting
   1. I receive timely notifications of meetings and events
   2. Staff are knowledgeable and helpful when called upon
   3. Staff are well prepared for meetings
   4. Staff make proper preparations for meetings so they are an efficient use of my time
   5. My travel arrangements are handled well
   6. I get reimbursed for expenses in a timely manner
   7. I value my involvement in SARE
2. Committees - provide logistical support
   1. Staff provide appropriate support for committees to function effectively
3. Solicitation and selection of new members
   1. Staff publicize AC positions to appropriate venues to bring in quality applications
4. Develop and distribute calls for proposals
   1. I have adequate opportunities to provide input in the development and refinement of the calls for proposals
   2. Staff promote the availability of different grant opportunities to all stakeholders
5. Facilitation of review process (comprehensive and fair)
   1. I feel informed about the expectations as a reviewer
   2. I have easy access to the proposals
   3. I have adequate time to review the proposals
   4. The proposal rating is straightforward and appropriate
   5. I have an appropriate number of proposals to review
   6. There are an appropriate number of reviewers for each proposal
   7. I feel there is adequate time during the AC meeting to discuss proposals
   8. The procedures for selecting proposals to fund by the AC are clearly understood and documented
   9. The staff and reviewer responsibilities during the AC meeting have been adequately considered for each grant program and staff take an appropriate role in the review process
6. Publicize project results and informational products
   1. Staff do a good job disseminating research results from the funded projects
   2. Staff do a good job promoting SARE educational products - manuals, fact sheets, etc.
   3. I find the website easy to use
   4. I find the newsletter useful
   5. I share/forward the newsletter to colleagues and other interested parties

Staff Survey

1. The Sponsored Programs Office is able to explain processes and requirements for awards and subawards
2. The Sponsored Programs Office sends out contracts in a timely manner
3. Invoices get paid within the timeframe set by the policies in the agreements section of the contract
4. There is support for finding answers and making sure processes are compliant with University and USDA regulations
5. Staff are able to receive adequate training to perform their duties
6. The host institution equipment and facilities are adequate so that I'm able to accomplish my work efficiently

State Coordinator Survey

1. There is appropriate leadership to encourage multi-state and regional cooperation
2. The PDP program is functioning well and producing results
3. PDP staff are knowledgeable and helpful when called upon
4. PDP staff are well prepared for meetings to efficiently make use of my time
5. I have adequate opportunities to provide input on PDP programs
6. I value my involvement in the PDP program
7. The PDP program facilitates training of a range of ag professionals in addition to Extension
8. The PDP program is impacting the adoption of sustainable ag practices through PDP training efforts

**Appendix B: Federal-State Matching Grant Program**

Establishment of a Federal-State Matching Grant Program (7USC 5813) is authorized under Chapter 1 to provide resources to states to assist in the creation or enhancement of state, research, extension, and education programs in sustainable agriculture. Funds for this program will not become available until appropriations for Chapter 1 exceed $15,000,000 and will not in any case exceed one-third of the appropriation for any fiscal year.

Participating states are required to provide at least 50% matching funds, and to have direct multi-organizational participation of farmers or ranchers and other appropriate organizations. This should include meaningful involvement of these organizations in the development, implementation or evaluation of the program. States eligible to receive a grant under this section may conduct a variety of activities, including:

1. encouraging the incorporation and integration of sustainable agriculture concerns in all State research, extension, and education projects.
2. educational programs for farmers/ranchers, educators, and the public.
3. development and funding of innovative research, extension, and education programs regarding sustainable agriculture.
4. conduct research and demonstration projects.
5. provide technical assistance to farmers and researchers.
6. activities that encourage farmer-to-farmer and rancher-to-rancher information exchanges.
7. incorporation of sustainable agriculture studies in undergraduate and graduate degree programs.
8. other activities that are appropriate to the agricultural concerns of the State that are consistent with the purpose of this chapter.

**Appendix C: State Extension Professional Development Program Coordinators**

**Guidance and Expectations in Sustainable Agriculture**

**Legislation**

The position of the State Extension Professional Development Coordinator (PDP) is a result of Public Law 101-624 (Nov. 28, 1990), or the 1990 “Farm Bill.” As part of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program (7 USC 5801-5832), a National Training Program was established (7USC 5832). The Secretary was directed to “designate an individual from the Cooperative Extension Service in each state to coordinate the National Training Program.” (Historically, states have generally appointed coordinators from each Land Grant institution.)

**Responsibilities**

The state PDP coordinator is “responsible, in cooperation with appropriate federal and state agencies, for developing and implementing a statewide training program for appropriate field office personnel. Such personnel were defined as including employees of the Extension Service, Soil Conservation Service (now NRCS), and other appropriate Department of Agriculture personnel, as determined by the Secretary, whose activities involve the provision of agricultural production and conservation information to agricultural producers.”

***What are some general expectations for the state PDP coordinators?***

Day-to-day activities to fulfill the duties of the state PDP coordinator would likely include these main areas:

* + 1. Training program development and delivery
    2. Promotion, networking, and coordination, especially of SARE-related activities
    3. Communication, reporting, and evaluation

***What are specific ideas to meet these expectations?***

Guidance and ideas for suggested activities and work elements in these three areas may include, but are not limited to, those listed below. State PDP coordinators may modify or add to this list to meet their specific local needs. Setting priorities and activities should be guided by planning and coordination that take into account appropriate agencies and interested parties within the state.

1. Training Program Development and Delivery:
   1. Provide annual sustainable agriculture training and educational program opportunities for all new appropriate field office personnel
   2. Develop and implement updated sustainable agriculture training and education opportunities for current staff

Additional related opportunities for consideration:

* 1. Maintain a listing of state producer grant cooperators and involve them and other farmers and ranchers in sustainable agriculture training and education
  2. Develop and/or partner with NGOs or farmer organizations in offering farms tours and field days

1. Promotion, Networking, and Coordination
   1. Promote the availability of SARE Chapter 1, PDP, producer grant, and other funding opportunities within the state
   2. Promote regional SARE program activities and opportunities
   3. Promote the availability of SARE Outreach educational materials and services, as well as those of ATTRA, state Food and Agriculture Councils (FACs), and other sources through conferences, field days, and workshops.
   4. Seek input annually from and coordinate regularly with NRCS, FSA, and Rural Development personnel about sustainable agriculture training needs and shared educational program opportunities. This input should be shared regularly with the regional AC.

Additional related opportunities for consideration:

* 1. Promote on-farm research and demonstration projects and programs
  2. Offer SARE Outreach, as well AFSIC, ATTRA, the National Agroforestry Center, FSA, NRCS, Rural Development and Risk Management Agency, educational materials (books, brochures, etc.) through the Extension system or other in-state networks.

1. Communication, Reporting, and Evaluation:
   1. Develop and submit timely reports of state sustainable agriculture programs, impacts, and activities to the required RCPDP.
   2. Submit documentation forms and develop ongoing evaluation of sustainable agriculture training programs to the RCPDP.
   3. Inform SARE regional coordinators of changes in PDP state personnel or contacts.
   4. Participate in regional PDP activities

Additional related opportunities for consideration:

* 1. Inform state Extension agriculture and natural resources program leaders or appropriate Extension administrators and Experiment Station Directors about SARE opportunities, materials, and activities.
  2. Participate in the PDP electronic mail groups to communicate with and respond to other state PDP representatives

1. Specified training (7USC 5832(g)) in the National Training Program includes:
   1. Assistance in developing farmer-to-farmer information exchange networks
   2. Coordination and publicizing sustainable agriculture farm tours and field days
   3. Extension program planning involving extensive farmer input and feedback in the design of new and ongoing research endeavors related to sustainable agriculture
   4. Technical assistance to farmers for strategies in making a transition to a more sustainable agriculture
   5. Consultation and close work with NRCS and FSA in carrying out related programs
   6. Developing and targeting areas highly susceptible to ground water contamination
   7. Developing information sources related to crop diversification, alternative crops, on- farm food or commodity processing and on-farm energy generation
   8. Establishing an educational program about well-water testing
   9. Providing specific information on water quality practices (BMPs), nutrient management practices, and whole-farm management systems.

**Appendix D: 2018 Host Institution Search Process**

The four original SARE host institutions were selected in 1990 without competition and there had been only four host institution transfers prior to 2018. USDA Departmental regulations (7 CRF 3015.158) require competition for discretionary grants and cooperative agreements greater than $75,000. To comply, NIFA held an open competition in 2018 for the opportunity to serve as a regional host institution for the next five years.

The SARE legislation requires that USDA work in conjunction with the regional ACs to select the host institutions. NIFA consulted with the ACs and others to establish a new multistep process to select the host institutions. After this consultation, NIFA published an RFA describing the application requirements, the rating criteria, and the selection process that would include coordinated reviews by both the ACs and NIFA.

Applicants were given 90 days to prepare applications. Completed applications were shared with the appropriate regional ACs to be rated independently by each council member and then to be discussed and rated collectively by the full AC. Members of the ACs were expected to abide by NIFA confidentiality requirements. The individual AC member comments and a summary of the full AC discussion of each proposal was then packaged for review by an expert peer review panel convened by NIFA.

NIFA’s expert panel followed NIFA’s established procedures for selection of an external panel manager and highly qualified reviewers, as well as conflict of interest and confidentiality restrictions. The panel members reviewed and rated each application independently, reviewed the AC comments, and then convened as a full panel to discuss and rank all the proposals received for each of the four regions.

Both the AC and the NIFA expert panel identified applicants they wanted to interview, with up to three interviews to be accommodated per region. Both the AC and the NIFA expert panel participated in the virtual interviews in a manner that would not disclose the identity of the NIFA expert panel members. A summary of the AC’s discussion of each interview was shared with the NIFA expert panel which then discussed the interviews, performed a final ranking, and made a recommendation to NIFA leadership about which applicant to select in each region.

After the selection process, NIFA sought input from parties engaged in the selection to improve future competitions. The biggest concern was the uncertainty between announcing the decision to compete and posting the competitive RFA. There were also concerns about frequency of the competition. Some commented that five years was an appropriate competition frequency, others recommended issuing RFAs every five years with options for multi-year extensions, and still others thought the frequency of RFAs should be every ten to twenty years. The new process was effective and its use in the 2023 competition will eliminate much of the delay and uncertainty associated with the first competition.

If a host institution relinquishes responsibility for administering the regional program during its five year competitively awarded tenure or NIFA and the AC determine that the host institution is not meeting the expectations based on a formal review process, a search for a new host institution may be triggered. Any such search will be administered competitively by NIFA using the established process for competitive selection of the host institutions.

**APPENDIX B**

**NCR-SARE COMMITTEE OPERATING PROCEDURES**

Executive Committee…….……. Appendix B, NCR-SARE Committee Operating Procedures   2

Technical Committee…….……. Appendix B, NCR-SARE Committee Operating Procedures   3

Nominating Committee ….……. Appendix B, NCR-SARE Committee Operating Procedures   7

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Partnership Committee ............. Appendix B, NCR-SARE Committee Operating Procedures   16

Youth Educator Committee........ Appendix B, NCR-SARE Committee Operating Procedures   17

**NCR-SARE Executive Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**

The Executive Committee acts on time sensitive issues on behalf of the AC between AC meetings. Specific activities include:

* Approving change of scope or Principal Investigator on NCR-SARE grants;
* Approving travel requests from NCR-SARE Administrative Council members wishing to represent the AC at an event or conference; and
* Approving significant policy or financial decisions. The Executive Committee may choose to put the decision to a full Administrative Council vote.
* Responding to inquiries received by NCR-SARE

**Membership Selection and Criteria**

* The membership consists of the chair, vice-chair, a co-chair of the Technical Committee, and two at-large members from the AC. It is the intention of the AC that the Executive Committee membership reflect the diversity of the AC on the Executive Committee by including representation from Extension, experiment station, farmer-rancher, and at large members.
* The at-large members are elected each year and can be re-elected, the vice-chair every two years, by the AC at the March AC meeting; a slate of candidates is presented by the Nominating Committee.
* Once a vice-chair is elected, at the end of the two-year term, he or she rotates to chair and then past-chair of the AC. They hold their AC position until their term as chair ends.
* If a member resigns, the Nominating Committee will propose a list of nominees, and the AC or EC will select the replacement to fill the vacated term.

**Membership Expectations**

* All EC members must adhere to the confidentiality and conflict of interest policies.
* EC members are expected to actively participate and respond in a timely manner to matters put before the EC membership.
* The Regional Director (ex officio member of the EC) should provide regular reports to the AC on the EC activities and decisions.

**Executive Committee Operation**

Matters that need to be presented to the Executive Committee are submitted to the Regional Coordinator.  The Coordinator provides Executive Committee members with sufficient background information and requests a vote within a week.  This can be done by email or by conference call.  The Executive Committee operates on a majority rules basis, so three affirmative votes suffice to approve the request.

**Staff Roles**   
The Regional Coordinator and the Regional PDP coordinator will also serve on the EC as ex-officio non-voting members.

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**NCR-SARE Technical Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**

Review and report on the technical merit of Research and Education (R&E) grant program proposals to the Administrative Council (AC) for consideration and award, as specified in the legislation establishing SARE

Specific activities include:

1. To review the technical merit of full proposals submitted under the annual Research and Education program grant solicitation;
2. To propose modifications to the RFP or program by way of the chair; and
3. To recommend the allocation of funds to those proposals that met the technical merit criteria.

**Membership Selection**

1. The membership composition of the Technical Committee (TC) represents the one exception to the “majority AC membership rule”.
2. The TC shall consist of approximately 20 members.
   1. Ca. 2/3 of the TC members should carry over to the next year.  The remaining 1/3 is comprised of members completing their third year of service.
   2. Two members of the AC should serve on the TC in staggered two year terms.
   3. Each year the Regional PDP coordinator shall designate 2 SARE state coordinators to serve on the TC (in addition to the ca. 20 members that have 3-year terms) in staggered two-year terms to become acquainted with the R&E grant process and the function of the TC.
   4. New members are suggested by the TC chair and are approved by the AC or the AC’s Executive Committee (EC).
3. The AC elects the chair of the TC.
   1. The TC chair is a full voting member of the AC, and *ex officio* member of the EC.

**Membership Criteria**

1. A TC member’s term is 3 years.
   1. A TC chair term is 4 years. The TC chair should meet the same criteria as TC members.
2. Selection
   1. The primary qualification for TC membership is technical expertise.
      1. To the extent practical, the mix of persons on the TC shall provide knowledge of the major agricultural systems and challenges within the region and represent the major agro-climatic areas present in the region.
      2. TC representation with the following areas of expertise is desirable :
         1. Integrated pest management
         2. Crop improvement/management
         3. Sociology
         4. Economics
         5. Animal science
         6. Dairy science
         7. Soil science
         8. agronomy
         9. Renewable energy
         10. Local foods
         11. Horticulture
         12. Organic farming
         13. Agribusiness
         14. Ag lending
         15. Rural community
   2. The TC may also contain representatives from the following organizations, similar to the demographic structure of the NCR-SARE Administrative Council:
      1. Cooperative Extension
      2. EPA
      3. ARS
      4. NRCS
      5. State or federal Geological Survey
      6. State agriculture agency
      7. Agribusiness
      8. Non-profit
      9. a farmer or rancher
   3. Two TC members from the same institution should be generally avoided unless it’s required to get the expertise necessary.
3. Resignation
   1. The vacating member will notify the chair of the TC vacancy as soon as practicable.
   2. The Chair of the TC will solicit nominations from the TC and AC.
      1. The primary criteria will be expertise within a discipline required with attention paid to geographical and category balance where possible.
   3. The chair will propose a prioritized list of nominees to the AC or EC for their consideration.
   4. The AC or EC will select the replacement to fill the vacated term.

**Membership Expectations**

1. All TC members must ensure to adhere to the confidentiality and conflict of interest policies.
   1. During the discussion or recommendation of proposed projects, any members with a conflict of interest must leave the room.
   2. When a large slate of projects is being voted upon – and individual projects are not being discussed – members with a conflict of interest may be present.
2. Members must consider all proposals on the basis of technical quality, relative to the goals of NCR-SARE and according to the evaluation criteria set forth in the request for proposals.
3. TC members must attend all TC meetings during their term or contact Regional SARE staff and/or the TC chair as soon as schedule conflicts are identified.
4. All TC members shall strictly maintain the confidentiality of all proposal evaluations, discussions, and recommendations.

**Technical Committee Operation**

1. Program overview
   1. Timeline
      * + August – Call for Preproposals
        + October – Pre-proposals Due
        + January – Authors Notified of Status of Preproposal
        + April – Full proposals due
        + July – Funding Decisions made by NCR-SARE AC
        + August – Authors notified on status of proposal
2. Pre-TC activity.  NCR-SARE issues a call for R&E pre-proposals.  The pre-proposals are divided into five discipline/subject groups.  Each AC member is assigned to one of the groups based on their expertise.  The preproposals in that group are reviewed by the AC members plus extramural input, based on relevance, impact and innovation.  That review is used to select a number (based on total number submitted in group) of pre-proposals from each group to invite to submit a full proposal.  The number of invitations for full proposals is set at ca. 3-times the amount of available funding.
3. TC panel meets and deliberates all full proposals received.
4. TC recommendations are delivered to the AC

The TC generally has one annual meeting, usually held the second or third week of June. Attendance of at least 60% of TC members shall be necessary to constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Proposal review packets and related materials will be sent to all TC members at least 45 days in advance of the meeting.  These materials will be developed jointly by the TC chair and the NCR-SARE R&E grant program coordinator.

Each TC member will review all of the received proposals according to the evaluation guidelines stated in the request for proposals and the instructions in the TC review packet.  The process includes the confidential use of the proposal document, extramural reviewer comments, input from other panel members and discussion, and excludes contacting the PI or collaborators or seeking any other information from the PI other than the proposal itself.  TC members should remain cautious about reviewing information outside of the proposal.  Links contained in proposals should not be viewed by reviewers.

Each proposal will be given an individual score by each TC member.  These scores will be submitted to NCR-SARE according to the instructions in the proposal review packet.  The scores will then be used to calculate the average, and proposals ranked based on average score for each proposal.  These scores will be distributed at the TC meeting for use during proposal discussions as a means of assessing the variation in perspectives for each proposal and collectively for all the proposals.

At the TC meeting, the research portfolio and the education portfolio will be discussed separately.  Discussion on each proposal will be led by the primary and secondary reviewers and then opened up for full committee comment with the TC chair facilitating the discussion.  The discussion should be based on the technical merits of each proposal.  Following discussion, each proposal will be placed in one of four priority categories for funding (high, medium, low, do not fund) and ranked among the other proposals in the portfolio.  After every proposal has been ranked within its portfolio, the research and education portfolios will be merged into a consolidated ranked order.  This ranked list will serve as the basis for the TC’s funding recommendation to the Administrative Council. The primary reviewer for each proposal will submit a written summary of the discussion of its technical merits, preferably by the end of the TC meeting, or immediately following the TC meeting but no later than one week following the meeting’s close.

In addition, the TC chair should facilitate a discussion of the TC’s processes during the TC meeting.  The TC may develop recommendations for process changes or provide feedback to the AC.  Such changes or feedback could include, but are not limited to: budget changes, emerging program needs, comments on or recommendations for improving the R&E program such as: the overall technical quality of the proposals received, the mix and level of the topics addressed by the call and/or proposals, modifications to the evaluation criteria used for the proposals received, or other ways to generally improve the R&E program.  The TC chair will present this feedback to the AC as part of the TC’s annual report to the AC.

The chair and the NCR SARE R&E grant program coordinator will jointly prepare and present the TC’s funding recommendations and technical merit reports to the AC.

**Staff Roles**

The NCR-SARE R&E grant program coordinator shall serve as a source of programmatic or administrative information to the TC, and work with the chair in facilitating communication between the TC and the AC.

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**NCR-SARE Nominating Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**

Help identify and recruit members for the Administrative Council and Executive Committee with special attention being given to limited resource and socially disadvantaged audiences as defined by USDA.

Specific activities include:

1. Soliciting nominations and reviewing candidates for existing and anticipated vacancies on the Administrative Council.
2. Soliciting nominations and reviewing candidates for existing and anticipated vacancies on the AC Executive Committee.

**Membership Selection and Criteria**

1. The Nominating Committee is comprised of five self-nominated members of the Administrative Council who are willing to actively serve and the vice chair.
2. The vice chair will serve as the nominating committee chair.

**Membership Expectations**

1. The Chair is expected to prepare and deliver any necessary reports for the full Administrative Council and/or Executive Committee’s review.
2. All committee members are expected to actively participate in committee tasks in a timely manner.

**Nominating Committee Operation**

**Administrative Council Membership**

1. The nomination process for Administrative Council (“AC” or “Council”) members is the same for vacated and term-limited seats.
   1. AC positions specified in legislation establishing SARE (1990 Farm Bill):
      1. ARS
      2. Cooperative State Research Service (now CSREES)
      3. The Extension Service
      4. State cooperative extension service
      5. State agricultural experiment stations
      6. The Soil Conservation service (now NRCS)
      7. State departments engaged in sustainable agriculture programs
      8. Nonprofit organizations with demonstrable experience
      9. Farmers utilizing systems and practices of sustainable agriculture
      10. Agribusiness
      11. The State or U.S. Geological Survey
      12. Other persons knowledgeable about sustainable agriculture and its impact on the environment and rural communities
   2. AC positions as specified by NCR-SARE’s AC in 2021 shall be as follows:
      1. 4 farmers and/or ranchers who utilize systems and practices of sustainable agriculture
      2. 2 representatives of non-profit organizations with demonstrable expertise on sustainable agriculture
      3. 5 representatives of agricultural colleges and universities, specifically:
      4. 1 representative of the state cooperative extension service (appointed by the regional extension directors)
      5. 1 representative of a state agricultural experiment station (elected from experiment station administrators or faculty)
      6. 2 representatives of a minority-serving college or university (one from an 1890 and one from a 1994 institution)
      7. 1 at-large university representative
      8. 1 agribusiness representative
      9. 1 state department of agriculture representative
      10. 1 representative of the Agricultural Research Service
      11. 1 representative of a State Geological Survey or the U.S. Geological Survey
      12. 1 representative of the Natural Resources Conservation Service
      13. 1 representative of the Environmental Protection Agency
      14. 1 representative of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture
      15. 1 representative with expertise in rural sociology and/or quality of life factors pertaining to the social aspects of agricultural sustainability
      16. 1 NCR-SARE technical committee chair or co-chair
2. Nominations are solicited by NCR-SARE from the following groups, organizations and agencies representing the state:
   1. Sustainable agriculture organization(s) (state or regions);
   2. Not-for-profit organizations;
   3. Directors Cooperative Extension;
   4. Directors Ag Experiment Stations;
   5. Administrative Council state representative;
   6. State PDP Coordinators and
   7. ARS, SCS, EPA, private foundations and regional representatives.
3. Positions on the AC have a term of 3 years, although AC members may be re-elected or reappointed for one additional term.
4. AC members should be individuals who…
   1. Are interested in making agriculture more sustainable and who have some knowledge about sustainable agriculture;
      1. The term “sustainable agriculture” shall have the same meaning given to the term by section 1404(17) of the National Agricultural Research, Extension and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C. 1303(17)).
   2. Are willing to commit the time and effort needed to review proposals and other documents;
   3. Are able and willing to participate in AC and committee meetings;
   4. Have the skills needed to effectively serve on a policy and review council.
      1. Interpersonal skills, group skills and ability to contribute to policy discussion and to development of common goals are at least as important as technical skills.
5. To nominate yourself for a seat on the NCR-SARE Administrative Council, submit the information using our online form at https://docs.google.com/a/umn.edu/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdLa-Wf2wDdo9JJOGsaBeKIdA-qDcOe1W9c4AKzJz96GVY4OQ/viewform
   1. the nominee’s areas of interest or focus in sustainable agriculture
   2. why the nominee is interested in serving on NCR-SARE's Administrative Council
   3. the nominee’s experience, affiliations and/or qualifications
   4. To nominate someone else for a seat on the NCR-SARE Administrative Council, please contact the person to gauge their interest, and then email the name and contact information for the nominee to [**ncrsare@umn.edu**](mailto:ncrsare@umn.edu) and we will contact them to solicit an application.
6. Before an election can proceed, NCR-SARE should receive at least two nominations for each open position, with the exception of the positions held by NRCS, EPA, ARS, and Extension Directors (which are traditionally appointed by the named organization).
   1. If this condition is not met, the AC must vote to waive this requirement.

**Election of Administrative Council Members**

1. The NCR-SARE Nominating Committee reviews the nominations to ensure the nominees meet the specifications in 1a and 1b.
   1. Existing NCR-SARE AC members vote on the nominees – usually by written ballot at the February AC meeting.
   2. Other election procedures (mail ballots, for example) agreed to by a majority of existing AC members can be used.
2. The AC will make selection from the submitted nominations.
3. The candidates receiving the most votes will be contacted to verify that they are willing and able to serve on the Council and then they will be invited to participate in Council activities.
4. New AC members are usually invited to attend the first AC meeting after the March AC meeting.

**Executive Committee Elections**

1. The nominating committee reviews the membership of the AC and identifies members willing to serve as vice-chair and at-large Executive Committee members and any other EC positions that need to be filled.
   1. The makeup of the Executive Committee should reflect the diversity of the AC.
2. AC votes before the end of the March AC meeting.
3. Terms begin immediately after the March AC meeting.

**Staff Roles**

The NCR-SARE Regional Coordinator will serve as an *ex officio* member without voting privileges.  The staff member will help the chair facilitate communications between the committee and the AC/EC and/or the NCR-SARE staff.

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**NCR-SARE Communications Advisory Group Operating Procedures**

The purpose of the Communications Advisory Group is to advise and provide guidance for communications efforts in the NCR.

Communications Advisory Group may be asked to:

* Help select annual themes for Field Notes (2 issues per year).
* Suggest guest authors, and recommend content for NCR-SARE publications and the NCR-SARE web site.
* Meet as needed via conference calls and email.
* Work closely with the Communications Specialist, who is responsible for all media and publications content, design, layout, editing for consistency and space, and overseeing of printing and distribution.
* Make recommendations to the Administrative Council regarding communications for the NCR.
* The Advisory Group provides feedback on NCR-SARE communication issues; the Group does not supervise the NCR-SARE Communication Specialist, set NCR-SARE communications policy, or make NCR-SARE budget decisions.

Communications Advisory Group Structure:

* The Communications Advisory Group is comprised mainly of AC members and the Communications Specialist. Other non-AC members may participate, but can comprise no more than 50% of the total membership.
* Communications Advisory Group members serve two-year terms and may be reappointed up to a maximum of three terms. There are no officer positions in this Group.
* The Communications Advisory Group does not have any spending authority; all publications and committee expenditures must be approved by the Regional Coordinator.

AC Approve - March 2010

**NCR-SARE Graduate Student Program Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose:**

* Serve as the review and advisory committee for the SARE Graduate Student Grant Program. Specific activities include:
* Develop annual Call for Proposals for Graduate Student Competitive Grants.
* Review and recommend funding levels for Graduate Student Competitive Grants.

**Membership Selection**

* The Committee will be composed of a minimum of three members from the Administrative Council, and two external committee members: one from research/extension, one farmer.  The three external members will serve three-year terms.
* Ad hoc members may be added, based on the number of proposals received and expertise required.

**Membership Expectations:**

* Provide written reviews of Graduate Student Grants (first three weeks of February)
* Participate in conference call to discuss and identify fundable Graduate Student Grant Proposals for consideration by the Administrative Council.

**Graduate Student Proposal Review Committee Operation:**

The Graduate Student Proposal Review Committee operates on a consensus model in most of its deliberations. Members review all proposals and identify them as highly fundable or fundable.  Scores and comments are shared with fellow members electronically prior to a conference call discussion.  The Chair leads the discussion and the group comes to consensus about which projects are fundable and identifies a preliminary ranking based on potential for funding (highly fundable, fundable.)

**Staff Roles:**

The Graduate Student Grant Program Coordinator serves as ex-officio on the Graduate Student Review Committee. This ex-officio role includes convening review committee, facilitating review panel meeting, and communicating with the committee on a regular basis. To the extent possible, staff serves only in a facilitative role for committee meetings (providing information, ensuring flow of discussion, etc.) and does not enter into proposal deliberations unless asked for specific information.

AC Approve –November 2011

**NCR-SARE Professional Development Program Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**:

Serve as the review and advisory committee for the SARE Professional Development Program. Specific activities include:

1. Develop plan of work (POW) and reporting requirements for State SARE Programs.
2. Develop annual Call for proposals for Professional Development Program Competitive Grants
3. Review and recommend funding levels for State Professional Development Programs to the Administrative Council.
4. Review and recommend funding levels for Professional Development Program Competitive Grants to the Administrative Council.

**Membership Selection**

1. The Committee will be composed of no less than 50% of the members representing groups from the Administrative Council.
2. Ad hoc members:  if an Administrative Council member is not available, the following process will be used:
3. Nominations will be requested from the Administrative Council.
4. The Review Committee will select the member from the nominations.
5. The ad hoc member will serve a 2 year term with no more than 2 consecutive terms.

**Membership Criteria:**

Membership on the Professional Development Program Review Committee will include (minimum) Administrative Council members representing the following groups:

1. Representative from the North Central Extension Directors
2. Representative from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
3. Representatives (minimum 2) from state extension systems
4. Farmer and/or rancher
5. Researcher from Land-grant University
6. Ad Hoc Administrative Council member
7. NCR SARE State Coordinators
8. Representative from non-profit organization
9. Researcher from Land-grant University

**Membership Expectations:**

1. Provide written reviews of State SARE POW and annual reports (Jan.-Feb).
2. Provide written reviews of PDP Competitive Grants (May-Pre-proposals, August – Full proposals)
3. Work with staff to develop State SARE POW and annual report requirements, and Call for Pre-proposals (October-November).
4. Develop list of recommended state projects (March) and Competitive Grants (November) for consideration by the Administrative Council.

**Professional Development Program Review Committee Operation:**

The PDP Review Committee operates on a consensus model in most of its deliberations. When reviewing proposals, a primary and secondary reviewer is assigned to each proposal. The primary reviewer is responsible for presenting a summary of proposal to the committee, and initiating discussion on proposal strengths and weaknesses. The secondary reviewer contributes to the discussion and provides additional comments on proposal activities, strengths and weaknesses. The PDP Review Committee then discusses overall merit of projects and identifies a preliminary ranking based on potential for funding (strongly recommended, recommended, and not recommended). When voting is necessary to determine funding recommendations, only Administrative Council PDP Review Committee members have voting privileges.

**Staff Roles:**

Professional Development Program staff (Coordinator and Associate Coordinator) serve as ex-officio on the PDP Review Committee. This ex-officio role includes convening review committee, soliciting external reviews, facilitating review panel meeting, and communicating with the committee on a regular basis. To the extent possible, staff serves only in a facilitative role for committee meetings (providing information, ensuring flow of discussion, etc.) and does not enter into proposal deliberations unless asked for specific information. Staff also facilitates communication between review committees, state coordinators and/or project coordinators.

AC Approve Revision - March 2010.

**NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Program Committee** **Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**: Serve as the review and advisory committee for the NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher Grant Program. Specific activities include:

1. Develop annual Call for Proposals for Farmer Rancher Grant (FRG) Program
2. Review FRG proposals and make funding recommendations to the Administrative Council (AC).
3. Provide feedback to AC concerning FRG program issues.

**Membership Selection**

1. The Committee will be composed of mostly Farmers and Ranchers (> 75%) and includes all farmer/rancher representatives on the Administrative Council and any other.

Administrative Council members who are interested in serving. There are typically at least 4 Administrative Council representatives on a committee of 30 people.

1. Additional members of the committee are invited using the following process:
   1. Nominations are requested from the Administrative Council, State Coordinators, and current members of the FRG Committee.
   2. Farmer Rancher Grant Coordinator selects the members from the nominations and/or recruits members to create a diverse group.
   3. Administrative Council (AC) members who are farmers or ranchers serve until their AC term expires. Other members serve up to a 3 year term. Members can choose to serve 1, 2, or 3 years. Active members who are unable to attend an in-person meeting can have their term extended 1 year.
   4. A chairperson is recruited from the existing committee every two years.

**Membership Criteria:** Membership on the Farmer Rancher Grant Review Committee includes:

1. Farmers and ranchers representing all 12 NCR-SARE states and a wide range of sustainable agriculture interests and experience.
2. Farmer and/or rancher Administrative Council members
3. Other Administrative Council members as interested.

**Membership Expectations:**

1. Provide reviews of Farmer Rancher Grant proposals (Dec-Jan).
2. Attend in-person meeting to develop list of recommended Farmer Rancher Grant proposals for consideration by the Administrative Council (Feb)
3. Chair and previous committee chairs work with staff to develop Call for Proposals (March-July).

**Farmer Rancher Grant Program Review Committee Operation:**

1. The FRG Review Committee operates on a consensus model. When reviewing proposals, each reviewer evaluates approximately 1/\6th of the proposals received on their own then considers all proposals submitted at an in-person meeting. When there are conflicts of interest, a member of the AC, the FRG Review Committee, or an outside reviewer without a conflict is asked to review the proposal. All evaluations and comments are taken into consideration during committee review.
2. The FRG Review Committee meets in person the day before the Spring AC meeting to discuss overall merit of projects and identify a preliminary ranking based on potential for funding (highly fundable, fundable, and not fundable). Those who cannot attend in person attend via Zoom. Committee members meet in 6 breakout groups, each with a facilitator, typically from Extension. The full committee then develops a slate of funding recommendations to present to the Administrative Council for consideration.

**Staff Roles:**

Farmer Rancher Grant program staff (Coordinator) serves as ex-officio on the FRG Review Committee. This ex-officio role includes convening review committee, soliciting reviewers when there are conflicts of interest, facilitating review panel conference calls and in-person meeting, and communicating with the committee. To the extent possible, staff serves only in a facilitative role for committee meetings (providing information, ensuring flow of discussion, etc.) and does not enter into proposal deliberations unless asked for specific information. Staff also facilitates communication between review committee, AC, state coordinators, and/or project coordinators.

Approved by AC February 26, 2015

**NCR-SARE Partnership Program Committee Operating Procedures**

**Purpose:**

Serve as the review and advisory committee for the SARE Partnership Grant

Program. Specific activities include:

1. Develop annual Call for Proposals for Partnership Grants.
2. Review and recommend funding levels for Partnership Grants.

**Membership Selection**

1. The Committee will be composed of a minimum of four members from the

Administrative Council, one state coordinator, and two or more external committee members. The external committee members may serve multi-year terms on the review committee or may rotate depending on topical needs for reviewer expertise. Nominations will be solicited from Administrative Council members, Alumni Organization members and State Coordinators.

1. *Ad hoc* members may be added, based on the number of proposals received and expertise required.

**Membership Expectations:**

1. Provide written reviews of Partnership Grants by review deadline.
2. Participate in conference call or in-person meeting to discuss and identify Partnership Grant Proposals for funding consideration by the Administrative Council.

**Partnership Proposal Review Committee Operation:**

The Partnership Proposal Review Committee operates on a consensus model in

most of its deliberations. Members review all proposals and identify them as highly fundable or fundable. Scores and comments are shared with fellow members electronically prior to a conference call discussion. Through facilitated discussion on a conference call or at an in person meeting, the group comes to consensus about which projects are fundable and identifies a preliminary ranking based on priority for funding.

**Staff Roles:**

The Partnership Grant Program Coordinator serves as ex-officio on the Partnership Review Committee. This ex-officio role includes convening the review committee, facilitating the review panel meeting, and communicating with the committee on a regular basis. Staff serve only in a facilitative role for committee meetings (providing information, ensuring flow of discussion, etc.) and do not comment on proposal evaluation unless asked for specific information.

AC Approve – February 2015

**NCR-SARE Youth Educator Review Committee** **Operating Procedures**

**Purpose**: Serve as the review and advisory committee for the Youth Educator Grant Program. Specific activities include:

1. Provide support and counsel regarding program strategies for accomplishing the Youth Educator goals of the Administrative Council.
2. Develop annual Call for Proposals for Youth Educator Grant (YED) Program.
3. Review YED grant proposals and make funding recommendations to the Administrative Council.

**Membership Selection**

* Members will include Administrative Council members, State Coordinators, AC Alumni, and others with an interest in Sustainable Agriculture youth education.
* Memberships will be limited to 20 people.

**Membership Expectations**

* + Provide written reviews of Youth Educator Grant proposals (Dec. - Jan).
  + Develop list of recommended Youth Educator Grant projects (Jan. – Feb.) for consideration by the Administrative Council.
  + Provide feedback to AC concerning YED program issues.
  + Committee chair works with staff to develop Call for Proposals (June-July).

**Youth Educator Review Committee Operation**

The YED Review Committee operates on a majority voting model in most of its deliberations. When reviewing proposals, reviewers evaluate a portion of proposals received and rank them as highly fundable, fundable, or not fundable. The committee meets by conference call to discuss overall merit of projects and develops a slate of funding recommendations to present to the Administrative Council for consideration.  State Coordinators do not review Youth Educator proposals from their states due to conflict of interest. All other members follow the NCR-SARE Conflict of Interest policy.

**Staff Role**

Youth Educator Grant program staff (YED Grant Program Coordinator) provides support for the committee.  This includes: convening review committee, facilitating review committee conference calls and in-person meetings, and communicating with the committee. To the extent possible, staff serves as a facilitator during committee meetings (providing information, ensuring flow of discussion, etc.) and does not enter into proposal deliberations unless asked for specific information. Staff also facilitates communication between review committee, AC, state coordinators, and/or project coordinators.

**Reporting and Planning**

The Youth Educator Review Committee will report annually to the Administrative Council on the activities and outcomes of the work of the committee including an itemized budget report and a preliminary plan of work/recommendations for the following year.

(Approved by NCR-SARE Y/YED Review Committee, Nov. 11, 2011). 

**APPENDIX C**

**NCR-SARE Alumni Organization**

The NCR-SARE Program recognizes that former members of the Administrative Council (AC) and programmatic committees and past staff have a broad understanding of and support for sustaining agriculture in the North Central Region. SARE recognizes that most of these alumni will continue to function as supporters and advocates of sustainable agriculture and should be able to do this through an active alumni structure.

# Vision

The vision of the North Central Region SARE Alumni Organization (NCSAO) is to be a significant contributor to the success of sustainable agriculture in the North Central Region (NCR) and assist NCR-SARE in leadership and program implementation. The NCR-SARE Alumni Organization is intended to be a reservoir of talent that NCR-SARE can call upon to help support and guide the program as needed region-wide.

# Mission

The mission or purpose of the NCR-SARE Alumni Organization is to utilize the diverse understanding, skills, and knowledge of former members of the NCR-SARE Administrative Council, programmatic committees and staff as advocates and active participants in functions and activities of NCR-SARE, in cooperation with the NCR-SARE Administrative Council.

Goals of the NCR-SARE Alumni Organization may include:

* + Opportunities for Alumni to maintain friendships with colleagues with whom they served while a member of NCR-SARE committees.
  + Establishment of a diverse group of Alumni who will actively advocate for NCR-SARE and provide feedback on NCR-SARE program operations and sustainable agriculture issues of regional importance.
  + Opportunities for Alumni to review proposals and projects, attend sustainable agriculture related conferences, participate in field days and workshops, and interact with agricultural professionals to support NCR-SARE.
  + Opportunities for Alumni to help farmers and ranchers, researchers, educators and other key audiences in the NC Region become more sustainable and more interactive with NCR-SARE

# NCR-SARE Alumni Organization Structure

Participation in the NCR-SARE Alumni Organization (NCSAO) is voluntary and recruitment is encouraged before members leave the Administrative Council and other programmatic committees. Current residency is not a requirement. Alumni may be members of the alumni organization for an unlimited time.

* + An NCR Alumni Committee of 5-10 active NCR-SARE Alumni will be established by a vote of the members of the NCSAO. Committee members will serve 4 years, with no limit on number of terms a member may serve. The NCR-SARE Coordinator will assign a regional staff liaison to the Alumni Committee.
  + A volunteer Regional Alumni Coordinator of the NCSAO will be elected by the Alumni Committee. The NCR-SARE Regional Alumni Coordinator is an Ad Hoc member of the AC and attends at least one AC meeting a year to report on the activities of the Alumni Organization.
  + The Alumni Committee will submit annually a NCSAO report of activities and accomplishments and also a proposed budget to the AC at the fall AC meeting. Funds will not be used for reimbursement of expenses for advocacy activities.
  + The NCR SARE office will maintain an up-to-date list of persons who have served on the Administrative Council and programmatic committees and make that list available to the Alumni Committee for use in soliciting membership in the Alumni Organization. The NCR SARE will also maintain a list of the current active membership in the Alumni Committee and the Alumni Organization.
  + The NCR-SARE Conflict of Interest Policy will be adhered to for all alumni involvement.

**North Central SARE Alumni Organization**

**Operating Procedures**

**Purpose:**

Serve as the governing committee for the NCR SARE Alumni Organization (NCR AO). Activities will include:

* Provide leadership for the Alumni Organization.
* Elect the Alumni Organization Coordinator from the Alumni Organization.
* Review and approve funding requests and make recommendations of Alumni Organization assignments to represent NCR SARE at presentations, events, PI visits, etc.
* Coordinate the NCR SARE Heroes program, review nominees and make recommendation for awards to the Administrative Council.

**Membership Selection and terms**

* The organization will be composed 5-10 active NCR  SARE Alumni, established by a vote of the members of the NCR SARE AO.
* Members do not have to be a current resident of NCR to be a member of AO.
* Members will serve 4 years, with no limit on number of terms a member may serve.

**Membership Expectations:**

* Participate in conference calls, respond to online requests and assist the NCR SARE Alumni Coordinator.
* Provide leadership and recommendations for the funding requests for NCR SARE Alumni representation.
* Review and select nominations for yearly NCR SARE Heroes Award.

**NCR SARE Alumni Association Coordinator:**

* Elected by the Alumni Organization for a term of  2 years.
* Convene and chair all conference calls and meetings and association as a whole.
* Review all requests for funding of Alumni Organization members to represent NCR SARE.  Contact all members of funding requests and present to Alumni Organization for selection and approval. Obtain and submit members reports to the AC.
* Attend (or a designated representative) at least one AC meeting a year to report on the activities and accomplishments of the Alumni Association.
* Submit proposed budget for organization operations, not including any funds for advocacy activities.

**Staff Roles**

The NCR SARE office will maintain an up-to-date list of persons who have served on the Administrative Council and programmatic committees and make that list available to the Alumni Coordinator for use in soliciting membership in the Alumni Organization. The NCR SARE will also maintain a list of the current active membership in the Alumni Organization.

One staff person will be assigned to assist the coordinator in convening the association and the committee, facilitating the Heroes of NCR SARE award process and communicating with the coordinator and organization on a regular basis.

**Additional information:**

The NCR-SARE Conflict of Interest Policy will be adhered to for all alumni involvement.

Alumni Organization members are eligible to submit proposals to NCR SARE grant programs, unless the member is serving on the review committee for that program.

**NCR-SARE Heroes Award**

**Justification:** Many people have helped shape NCR SARE over the past 24 years through their leadership and vision. There has never been a process or mechanism to recognize their contributions and impact on sustainable agriculture in the region.

**Purpose/Goal:**  To bring awareness of, recognize and pay tribute to people (alive or deceased) who have made significant contributions to the North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. The NCR SARE (North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Administrative Council may select up to two people a year to designate as a “NCR SARE Hero.”

**Project Coordination:**  The project will be coordinated by the *NCR SARE Alumni Organization*

**Selection and award timeline:**

* An annual call for nominations will be released in early February and nominations for the current year will be closed at the end of March.
* The NCR SARE Alumni Organization or designated committee for the organization will review nominations in April and recommend two nominees to be reviewed and approved by the AC.
* Heroes will be notified and they or a family member (if deceased or unable to attend) will be invited to attend the July Administrative Council meeting to receive recognition and the award. (Expenses covered by NCR SARE).
* Awardees or a family member will be interviewed by the NCR Communications Specialist.
* The honorees name, picture and story will be placed on the NCR SARE website and in the fall-winter Field Notes.
* A “NCR SARE Heroes Corner” will be established on the NCR SARE website providing background on the program and all the awardees will be listed with their pictures.

**Nomination Process:**

* Nominations may be submitted by anyone.
* An official nomination form will be available on the NCR SARE website and must be included in the nomination package.
* Alumni Heroes Committee reviews, and recommends candidates to the NCR AC
* Applications received will be maintained on file NCR SARE and maintained for consideration in additional years.

**Criteria**

* Service to NCR SARE and/or national SARE
* Leadership in sustainable agriculture locally and regionally
* Lasting impacts to sustainability in the NCR SARE
* The Committee may seek additional information.

1. The EPA ACE program no longer exists. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2. Members of the 2001 Ad-Hoc Mission Statement Committee that developed the NCR SARE Mission Statement were: Jim Goodman, Christine Lietzau, Fred Madison, Barbara Van Til, and Bill Wilcke. In March 2012, the phrase “strengthens rural communities” was changed to “strengthens communities.”   
    [↑](#footnote-ref-2)