

North Central Region
Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program
(SARE)



Report on the Expanded State Professional Development Program

Submitted to the Administrative Council, June 2007

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Executive Summary

In 2004 the North Central Region SARE Administrative Council made a decision to expand state Professional Development Programs (PDP) by increasing the responsibilities of the state coordinator and increasing the funding levels allocated to state programs. The primary objective of this expansion was to increase educator participation, and subsequent practice change, associated with sustainable agriculture educational programming and promotion. A secondary goal was to establish the state coordinator as the “Face of SARE” and contact person for SARE information in each state. At the time that this program was expanded, a commitment was made to evaluate its impact and effectiveness after three years. This report includes results demonstrating the impact of the expanded state programs throughout the North Central Region.

The first chapter of the report includes detailed information on state professional development program structure, activities and outcomes. Budget analysis of state programs indicates that the majority of program funds are used for direct professional development program activities. These activities are guided by outcomes that are identified by active state advisory committees. Specific activities conducted through the SARE professional development program include travel scholarships, mini-grants, SARE grant writing and informational workshops, and SARE-sponsored professional development workshops and tours. An additional outcome associated with the expanded SARE Professional Development Program is institutional change and increased commitment shown by land grant universities throughout the North Central Region to provide support for educational programming in sustainable agriculture. Outcomes for each of these activities are documented, providing strong evidence that professional development efforts have led to increased activity and programming by educators throughout the North Central Region.

The second chapter of the report includes information obtained from a regional, cross-sectional survey undertaken by the Regional PDP Coordinator. When contrasted with the results obtained from a 2003 baseline survey, it is clear that the climate and landscape for sustainable agriculture has changed significantly for extension educators. Results indicate a growing awareness of farmer and university interest in sustainable agriculture, and document increased knowledge in a wide variety of sustainable agriculture topics. Concomitant with increased awareness and knowledge is an increase in the number of educational programs provided in topics associated with sustainable agriculture to a broader audience, as compared to educator practice in 2003.

The third chapter of the report includes information obtained from interviews with state coordinators. These interviews provide state coordinators’ perspectives on the impact of the expanded state program on sustainable agriculture activities in their state. All state coordinators expressed support and appreciation for the program, but also identified areas for improvement. Specifically, several state coordinators expressed concern about the growing emphasis on evaluation (although other coordinators expressed appreciation for the utility of evaluation in improving programs) and unmet opportunities for expanding

overall sustainable agriculture educational programs to broader audiences, as opposed to the primary focus on educators.

In summary, this report provides a “snapshot” picture of a professional development program that has succeeded in empowering educators (and universities) to expand their sustainable agriculture educational programs to diverse audiences. Although the program continues to evolve and will need to continue to evaluate its efforts, the expanded state professional development program has succeeded in assisting educators to better meet the sustainable agriculture informational and educational needs of both the general public and farmers.

Part I. State Professional Development Programs – Structure, Budget and Outcomes

Background and Introduction

Since 1988, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has advanced farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities. As part of the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, SARE provides competitive grants for research and education programs, and outreach programs designed to improve agricultural systems. The goals of NCR SARE are to 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 rural life and support owner-operated farms; protect human health and safety; and promote crop, livestock and enterprise diversity and the well-being of animals.

History of the SARE Professional Development Pilot Program

Begun in 1994, SARE's Professional Development Program (PDP) provides sustainable agriculture education and outreach strategies and support for Cooperative Extension agents, Natural Resources Conservation Service staff and other agricultural educators who work directly with farmers and ranchers. Administered and funded by SARE, the Professional Development Program has historically received annual allocations of about \$4 million on a national level. Funds received at the national level are then provided to regions to use for professional development programming. Funds at the regional level have varied from approximately \$700,000 (2000) to \$1.09 million

(2003). Current regional funding levels are approximately \$885,000.

State sustainable agriculture professional development programs have undergone significant change since the early years of the North Central SARE PDP. Originally funded at relatively low levels (\$9,000 to \$12,000 per state); state coordinators were expected to provide basic assistance and coordination to meet the professional development needs of extension educators in their states. This limited level of support made it difficult for state programs to provide truly comprehensive activities linked with all aspects of the SARE Program—including Research, Education, and Producer Grants. As the SARE Program has evolved and become more integrated on a regional level, there is recognition that in addition to their critical role in professional development, state coordinators can assist in promoting SARE-related issues by working with diverse audiences.

State Programs-Plans of Work

In recognition of these changes, the Administrative Council launched a pilot program in 2004 within the North Central Region to support an expansion of state sustainable agriculture programs with respect to expectations for programs and coordinators and respective funding levels. These expanded expectations and guidelines for states applying to participate in this pilot program include:

- 1) Each state must identify an individual or team of individuals to act as the state sustainable agriculture coordinator or team. This individual or team of individuals will be referred to as the “State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator” as opposed to the “PDP Coordinator”.
- 2) The State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator is charged with actively promoting, educating, facilitating and networking with SARE grant

recipients, audiences interested in receiving SARE grants and key stakeholders wanting to learn more about sustainable agriculture and the SARE Program. The State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator is also expected to advance the visibility and importance of sustainable agriculture within their land grant institution.

- 3) Because of the promotional and assistance nature of the position, the State Sustainable Coordinator is not eligible to apply for or receive SARE funds and are covered by the same Conflict of Interest policy under which the Administrative Council operates;
- 4) The State Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator is expected to work closely with stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, extension educators, non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies to identify specific, clear and measurable outcomes for sustainable agriculture education and professional development within their state and include a proposal for achieving (and measuring progress toward) outcomes as part of a Plan of Work;
- 5) Each state must submit a Plan of Work proposing activities and outcomes appropriate for achieving SARE educational and professional development outcomes within a state. The Plan of Work is rigorously reviewed by the Professional Development Program Committee of the Administrative Council; and
- 6) Each state is eligible to apply for base funding up to \$50,000 with a maximum of \$25,000 available for salary support for the state

coordinator. In cases where SARE funds are used to support coordinator(s) salaries, the coordinator must have a 0.25 EFT appointment assigned to SARE coordination activities.

Because the educational and agricultural environment within each state is different, state plans are diverse and include state-specific outcomes, goals and activities. Although the Plan of Work is not expected to provide specific details on all activities, it also provides background information on previous professional development and relevant sustainable agriculture activities and accomplishments, and logical links between past activities, current needs as identified by critical stakeholders, and proposed activities and outcomes. Plans of Work also include information on how progress toward achieving outcomes will be monitored and evaluated.

The Professional Development Program Committee of the SARE Administrative Council and the PDP Regional Coordinator rigorously review each state Plan of Work. The PDP Review Committee asks the following questions when evaluating the Plan of Work:

- 1) Do expected outcomes address the expanded role of the state sustainable agriculture programs/coordinators as outlined above? Do they include outcomes associated with Research and Education Grants, Producer Grants, Graduate Student Grants and Professional Development Program Grants?
- 2) Are the expected outcomes clear, logical, measurable, and meaningful for the state?

- 3) Is there evidence of stakeholder input and involvement in the identification of appropriate outcomes, and in the implementation of activities associated with the Plan of Work?
- 4) Are activities appropriate for achieving outcomes and/or is there a clearly outlined process for identifying and implementing activities?
- 5) Does the Plan include an evaluation process that will monitor progress toward outcomes and provide ongoing information for program improvement?
- 6) Does past performance toward outcomes identified in last year's Plan of Work (as based on a review of the annual report) merit further investment in the state?

State Program Information

Advisory Committees

All state programs have active advisory committees that meet at least once a year to discuss program priorities (Table 1). In many states, these committees (or a subcommittee) review and award travel scholarships and mini-grants. In some states these committees work closely with established extension teams (Ohio, Indiana). All state advisory committees include farmer, non-profit and extension representation, and actively demonstrate the importance of partnership in designing and implementing professional development programs.

Budget

Within the past three years (2005-2007) the SARE PDP has distributed over \$1,641,278 to state programs for implementing professional development and SARE promotion activities within their state (Table 2). On average, each state receives \$50,000;

however, several states have been awarded reduced funding levels (data not included) and some of the funding for 2007 is still under consideration.

The largest single budget category is personnel (37%), which is logical since coordinating and delivering sustainable agriculture educational and professional development programs is time-intensive (Figure 1). However, there is significant variation between states in the amount of funds used for personnel, with a third of the states (IL,IN,KS,IA) requesting less than 30% of budget to be used for personnel. The fact that many states do not request the maximum allowable expenses for personnel indicates a strong commitment to sustainable agriculture by land grant university extension systems.

After personnel costs, the largest budget categories are travel scholarships and mini-grants, which combined constitute 24% of the overall regional budget. These are funds that flow through state advisory committees (in a competitive selection process) directly to educators (extension and other) for support of travel to sustainable agriculture professional development meetings and workshops. Other direct professional development categories include tours, publications, conferences and meetings. Figure 2 illustrates that when dividing costs into the broad categories of program support (personnel, office, travel for Coordinator) and direct professional development activities, that program support constitutes less than half of the professional development budget, with direct professional development activities and publications accounting for 54% of total program costs.

Program Activities

Every state submits a Plan of Work that identifies intended program outcomes and outlines program activities for the coming year. These Plans of Work are evaluated, along with program reports, to determine funding levels for recommendation to the Administrative Council. As the pilot program has evolved, some aspects of programming and reporting have become more consistent across the states. For instance, every state included SARE grant workshops in 2006, as compared to only three states offering SARE grant writing workshops in 2004.

Table 3 provides a breakdown of major activities, by state, for the past three years of the pilot program (2004-2006). As is apparent from the table, the region has experienced significant growth in the number of states that offer travel scholarships and mini-grants. Additionally, all states now offer some form of grant writing workshop (with some states conducting satellite or on-line workshops), and over 764 individuals (including farmers, educators, researchers) throughout the North Central region participated in SARE grant writing workshops in 2006.

The increasing emphasis on travel scholarships and mini-grants within state programs reflects a growing demand among educators to receive training, and an opportunity to leverage SARE funds with local funds to support educator professional development. In most cases, travel scholarships and mini-grants provide only a portion of funds required to participate in a meeting or conduct a local program. SARE funds are used to augment local support, and play an important role in encouraging educators to include sustainable agriculture in their own local programming.

Travel scholarships and mini-grants also provide an opportunity to collect information on discrete professional development outcomes associated with SARE funds. As the SARE PDP has evolved, State Coordinators have taken the lead in the development of evaluation instruments that are used to identify educator behavior change associated with SARE funding. These evaluation instruments have been adopted throughout the North Central Region and provide an automated tracking system for determining professional development impact. For instance, an educator who applies for a travel scholarship is asked how they will use the information obtained from the activity in local programming, which the committee then uses to evaluate and select scholarships. Immediately after attending the event the educator is asked to provide a brief report on the event and note their intention for using the information obtained in local programming. A follow-up is then automatically generated at 6-9 months and 12 months post-event, in which the educator is asked for specific examples of how their local programming has changed as a result of attending the initial event. This system, which also operates for mini-grants, provides a way to track outcomes for these important activities. Similarly, a sub sample of SARE workshop participants is also asked 6-12 months after the event questions about whether (and how) they used the workshop information in their own programs. While outcome tracking of this kind requires significant effort, it also allows state coordinators to gauge the impact and effectiveness of SARE funding and activities.

Professional Development Outcomes

Given the diversity and comprehensive nature of state SARE Programs, collecting information across states can be a challenge. While uniform evaluation forms have been

adopted by all states in 2007 for travel scholarships and mini-grants, evaluative information on overall program outcomes has been collected by all states from 2004-2007. Although some of this information is more difficult to quantify, altogether it illustrates the significant impact attributable to the expanded SARE professional development program. Selected outcomes are collected below, and grouped by broad impact category, for ease of interpretation:

Educator Practice Change Associated with Travel Scholarships

- A travel scholarship to an educator from Yankton Co. SD to attend a grant writing workshop in the fall of 2006 provided new information and great enthusiasm for positive change. The educator has since gone on, with SARE support, to organize training in organic agriculture for educators in eastern SD, northeast NE, and northwestern IA, scheduled for summer, 2007.
- A travel scholarship provided to an educator in Corson Co. SD for attendance at a meat goat production workshop held in Oklahoma in the fall of 2006 resulted in that educator taking the lead for the development of a three state workshop on meat goat production to be held Aberdeen in the fall of 2007.
- 29% of Kansas SARE Program participants have implemented new sustainable agriculture programming, 36% have incorporated sustainable agriculture information into existing extension programming, and 44% of recipients have used their expanded understanding of sustainability to work one-on-one with farmers and ranchers in their county/district.
- In 2006, nine WI educators, 5 NRCS and 3 other agricultural educators received SARE travel scholarships to attend the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference. All of them used information from the conference to answer client questions and most incorporated information about organic agriculture into their regular programming. Specific examples include: 1) one educator set up organic research trial and demonstrations at a research station, that was eventually toured by 140 visitors; 2) one educator organized a conference on organic agriculture in his area attended by more than 60 farmers and educators; 3) one educator set up research projects on organic farms as well as at a research station; and 4) four educators developed new programming on organic agriculture that the delivered to more than 290 people.

Educator Practice Change Associated with Mini-Grants

- Kansas educators have utilized mini-grants to design and install eleven sustainable agriculture related programs. Six of the new programs have been incorporated into ongoing extension programming. The funds used for mini-

grants were also leveraged by other state and local sources equal to the amount of SARE funds used in mini-grant projects.

- The ISU College of Agriculture (COA) desired to work more directly and visibly with Iowa farmers and to involve key educators in more on-farm research. The State Sustainable Ag Coordinator was asked to implement this new program with funding from the COA. A combined SARE/PDP/COA/PFI call for mini research proposals was issued and 11 Iowa key educators developed and conducted on-farm research programs with partner farmers.
- A Northern Illinois Horticulture and Community Development Educator received a mini-grant in 2006 (Building a Successful Farmer's Market – Training for University of Illinois Extension and Market Managers). Outcomes from the project included: 1) creation of a local foods and Farmer's Market library at the U of I; 2) training of five U of I extension staff in farmer's market development, management and promotion; 3) extensive evaluation of the market (review of policies, vendor commitment and satisfaction, and customer attendance and satisfaction) and; 4) assisted neighboring communities with the development of new markets and enhancement of an existing market.
- The WI Soil Ecology Team, which includes extension, NRCS and Land Conservation Department educators, was formed as a result of a regional PDP grant in 2002. This team started a very active outreach program in 2004, with field days in different parts of the state every year and a workshop for educators in 2004 and planned for 2007.

Educator Practice Change Associated with SARE Workshops

- On October 3, 2006, the Nebraska SARE program held a Satellite Conference that was down linked at 18 sites throughout Nebraska. Fourteen Extension Participants reported back on an evaluation of the conference that was held. On a seven point scale with one indicating very little knowledge and seven indicating excellent knowledge, those fourteen participants reporting back indicated that in all six categories they had improved their knowledge of the SARE program by an average of two points based on the satellite program that they had viewed. Participants were also asked to comment on their experience with the satellite conference. Some of those comments included "It was a good conference, especially if there were some things you did not know about the program. It provided the participants with knowledge they can use to work with the SARE Program and apply for grants or help farmers and ranchers who are interested in sustainable agriculture find information or apply for a grant."
- As a result of participating in a day-long Kansas SARE sponsored farm-to-school workshop, two non-profit educators have assisted three school food service directors purchasing locally grown produce for use in the local school system.

- The ISU Department of Ag Education and Studies along with the Iowa Department of Education contacted the State Sustainable Ag Coordinator for assistance and training of key educational personnel (Iowa secondary agriculture instructors). 165 Iowa key educators (vocational agriculture instructors) sought special training and attended 5 sustainable agriculture training sessions where they received training and materials on alternative livestock direct marketing strategies for use in the classroom. A request was received for additional training in 2007; Follow-up requests (3) for additional information have since been received by the SSAC.
- As a result of participating in a day-long SARE sponsored workshop on cover crops in Ohio, 43 educators have conducted sixteen local programs in 2006 for farm audiences on cover crop topics, resulting in savings to participating families of an average of \$427 per farm. Eight of these educators are conducting on-farm research/demonstration projects on cover crops with cooperating farmers in their local communities. In 2003, no Extension Educators conducted programs on cover crops in their local communities.
- Fifteen extension educators are or will be using their learning from a “Sustainable Hog Production” training by directly assisting farmer clientele; helping producers find alternative markets, and offering programs on natural and organic hog production and markets. The professionals who received the training are more able to describe in detail production, management, processing and marketing options for sustainable hog producers. They can also describe where to access resources for the latest information on alternatively raised hogs.

Institutional Change Associated with SARE State Programs

- In the midst of decreasing budgets and competing demands for limited resources, the University of Illinois hired its first Small Farm and Sustainable Agriculture Extension Specialist in 2007. This position evolved, in part, due to the successes of the IL SARE Coordinator, who has now expanded her program to include responsibility for statewide coordination of all sustainable agriculture and small farm educational programs.
- Due, in part, to the efforts of the MO-SARE Program, its advisory board and an extensive number of sustainable agriculture supporters, the University of Missouri has established the first undergraduate major and minor in Sustainable Agriculture in the Midwest. The Sustainable Agriculture emphasis is now an integral component of the General Agriculture degree at MU. In addition, MO-SARE has fully participated in a grant to develop 3 new courses on Sustainable Agriculture to complement the degree program: “Sustainable Agriculture: Theory and Practice”, “Community Food Systems”, and “Integrated Crop and Livestock Farming Systems”. The degree and new courses will also be offered as a “Continuing Education” program for Agriculture Extension and non-Extension professionals.

- One of the teams within the Wisconsin extension system (Emerging Agricultural Markets team) is led by educators who have taken advantage of many of SARE Programs, including in-state and regional workshops, and travel scholarships. Under their leadership, the EAM team projects have included the following: 1) an annual direct marketing conference and direct marketing workshops held in different parts of the state; 2) development of marketing information in Hmong to help growers sell their vegetables; 3) a wide variety of business planning programs tailored to needs in different areas of the state; 4) workshops addressing the information and networking needs of women in value-added agriculture; 5) assisting with the establishment of a grass-based dairy cooperative; 6) sourcing local, sustainable food for major conferences; and 6) statewide Local Foods Summit that drew 200 participants, including educators, farmers, chefs, community organizers and others.
- University of Minnesota Extension is a new co-signatory on the agreement between the College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (CFANS) at the University of Minnesota (Minnesota's land grant institution) and the Sustainers' Coalition (a group of five nonprofit organizations working to promote sustainable agriculture) to continue the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA). MISA's purpose is to bring together the diverse interests of the agricultural community with interests from across the University community in a cooperative effort to develop and promote sustainable agriculture in Minnesota and beyond. This development evolved, in part, as a result of the appointment of a MISA staff member (Beth Nelson) to assume responsibility for Minnesota's SARE PDP activity. This appointment led to greater awareness by Extension educators of not only SARE resources and opportunities, but also MISA resources and opportunities, and in general, sustainable agriculture activity in Minnesota. It also helped MISA to understand Minnesota's Extension structure and roles and functions of various groups

Working with Underserved Audiences

- A SARE presentation and roundtable discussion with the Immigrant Development Center in Fargo, ND in fall, 2006 planned a professional development workshop scheduled for fall, 2007 focused on organic vegetable production. This workshop, which will be supported by SARE funds, will focus on providing information that extension educators and non-profit educators need to work with new immigrant communities interested in growing and marketing organic vegetables.
- A University of Illinois County Extension Director attended the Growing Power workshop in spring, 2006. During that workshop, she developed a plan to start a community garden in a low income, diverse neighborhood in Quincy, IL. The Quincy community garden became a reality later that spring and expanded in 2007. The Director also received a PDP mini-grant to support educational activities associated with the Locally Grown Food Fest in Quincy, and presented results from the community garden at the National SARE meeting in Oconomowoc, WI.

- Changing demographics in Iowa have rapidly expanded potential audiences for sustainable agriculture education at the local level. Seven Iowa educators assessed local needs, and developed and delivered local sustainable agriculture educational programming (workshops) to undeserved clientele including women and Hispanic audiences.
- Increased awareness throughout Minnesota of work in sustainable agriculture by the White Earth Land Recovery Project (farmer-rancher and SARE R&E grants) through the SARE coordinator writing articles about the projects for the Sustainable Agriculture Newsletter and the “Greenbook” (publication about farmer research and demonstration projects published annually by our Minnesota Department of Agriculture.)
- Five travel scholarships awarded to members of AfroEco group in St. Paul to gain information about urban sustainable agriculture at various conferences and workshops. The AfroEco group later became a major co-sponsor of the Black Environmental Thought conference recently held in Tuskegee, AL.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Professional Development Program changed significantly as a result of the pilot expanded state program launched in 1994. As compared to previous activities funded at the state level, the pilot program allowed for a broad expansion of activities, including the promotion and dissemination of SARE Program results and activities, and an increased emphasis on support of individual level professional development through travel scholarships and mini-grants. Along with these changes, substantially increased efforts in program evaluation and impact assessment have allowed state programs to more fully understand program impact and target their efforts to activities that provide more effective forms of professional development.

While the expanded state pilot program has substantially expanded the scope of professional development within the states of the North Central Region, challenges remain. Foremost among those challenges is the need to continue identifying program impact and adapting professional development activities that ultimately contribute to

meeting the sustainable agriculture information needs of farmers. The adoption of standard evaluation instruments can assist in reaching this goal, but care must be taken to avoid placing too much of an evaluative burden on state coordinators.

Additionally, there is a continuing tension between professional development activities that target educators (and include farmers as participants and trainers), and those that provide direct sustainable agriculture programming to farmers and other end users. It is likely that this tension will continue for the near future, but it is hoped that as more extension educators gain knowledge and skills necessary for sustainable agriculture programming that state coordinators will be able to focus on professional development.

In conclusion, the expanded state pilot professional development program has increased the capacity and activity of educators working with farmers in the area of sustainable agriculture. The majority of funds in the program are used to directly support professional development activities undertaken by county and regional educators. The program has clearly documented educator behavioral change with respect to increased sustainable agriculture knowledge and programming. Ultimately, however, our continuing challenge is to document the impact of this increased capacity and activity of educators down to impacts and outcomes seen at the farm and community level throughout the North Central Region.

Table 1. Sustainable agriculture professional development program advisory committees

State	Total Committee	Extension/ Education	Non-profit /Farmer	Notes
Illinois	10	6	4	
Indiana	15	1	14	* Small farm/sustainable agriculture team from extension works with stakeholder advisory team (19 members)
Iowa	9	4	5	
Kansas	15	9	6	
Michigan	10	7	3	
Minnesota	12	6	5	
Missouri	10	9	1	* Committee changed mid-2007 with change in co-coordinator
Nebraska	11	6	5	
North Dakota/South Dakota	17	3	14	
Ohio	16	0	16	* Stakeholder advisory committee works with Extension Sustainable Agriculture Team
Wisconsin	26	12	14	

Table 1. NCR SARE PDP state program budget breakdown, by state, by category, 2004-2007.

State/Category	Total	IL	IN	IA	KS	MN	MO	NE	ND/SD	OH	WI
Personnel	609663	34983	16772	38585	29029	76650	52534	60181	152860	73170	74899
Travel schol.	198875	16000	15000	19000	25600	20025	13550	22700	30000	15000	22000
Mini-grant	204300	36000	28000	18800	37000	16500	5500	0	50000	10000	2500
Subcontracts	83550	11614	0	31550	6300	0	3486	18100	3000	0	9500
Travel for SC	83048	7348	3000	8800	6000	5700	8250	6330	17900	15418	4302
Workshop	127969	3025	24184	17300	15750	0	22200	17850	7400	1000	19260
Tours	81134	6300	40874	800	0	2000	13050	8400	0	9710	0
Conf/Meeting	75956	1930	16496	3000	5748	12000	6000	5970	18561	0	6251
Office	37657	0	1000	1466	4601	2750	0	6142	11209	8301	2188
Publications	108055	32800	0	1640	13320	13375	15600	3000	4819	14401	9100
Misc.	31071	0	2702	3636	6652	1000	9830	0	4251	3000	0
Total		150,000	148,028	144,577	150000	150,000	150,000	148673	300,000	150000	150,000

Michigan not included in analysis since budget details are unavailable.

Table 3. Program activities, by state, 2004-2006.

State	Travel Scholarships		Mini-Grants		GW Workshop		Non-GW Workshops and Tours	
	#	\$	#	\$	#	participants	#	Educator participants
IL								
2004	12	4,767	10	9,800	5	71	27	205
2005	12	2,647	12	11,500	4	46	38	322
2006	16	6,321	12	11,916	2	35	6	69
IN								
2004	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	6	33
2005	7	4,740	NR	NR	1	40	5	35
2006	3	742			15	60	5	98
IA								
2004	18	4,950	10	3,400	NR	NR	10	NA
2005	34	6,081	3	1,200	2	71	20	NA
2006	25	4,530	13	4,900	NR	NR	5	145
KS								
2004	37	8,468	9	6,255	NR	NR	5	237
2005	11	4,794	2	1,500	4	43	9	12
2006	25	8,937	6	4,100	2	38	5	71
MI								
2004	NR	NR	3	1,000	NR	NR	8	NA
2005	16	4,898	1	1,000	7	63	25	174
2006	15	4,425	NR	NR	1	30	6	NA
MN								
2004	29	11,730	NR	NR	0	0	3	NA
2005	24	10,140	5	2,800	NR	NR	NR	NR
2006	14	6,770	3	2,290	1	35	NR	NR
MO								
2004	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	28	31
2005	11	2,101	4	907	NR	NR	2	NA
2006	18	3774	1	660	8	90	6	NA
NE								
2004	2	NR	NR	NR	3	14	6	260
2005	9	618	NR	NR	6	25	3	27
2006	12	5052	NR	NR	18	35	2	69
ND/SD								
2004	NR	NR	8	20,000	NR	NR	1	5
2005	NR	NR	NR	1	34	NR	NR	NR
2006	15	7,500	3	5,400	6	228	NR	NR
OH								
2004	17	5,149	4	1,975	2	131	27	NA
2005	8	3,850	8	4,000	6	169	11	36
2006	5	1,928	NR	NR	4	13	16	NA
WI								
2004	33	4,548	NR	NR	NR	NR	2	69
2005	37	7,094	NR	NR	NR	NR	6	67
2006	42	8,869	9	2,577	NA	NA	8	93

Notes:

NR - none reported.

NA – information is not available to allow us to distinguish between educator and other participation in workshop or tour.

This table underestimates overall participation in SARE workshops since it only includes educator participants. While other participants are critical to success of SARE PDP workshops, by focusing solely on educator participants we are able to more closely evaluate the professional development impact of SARE workshops.

Figure 1. 2005-2007 Regional Budget Information

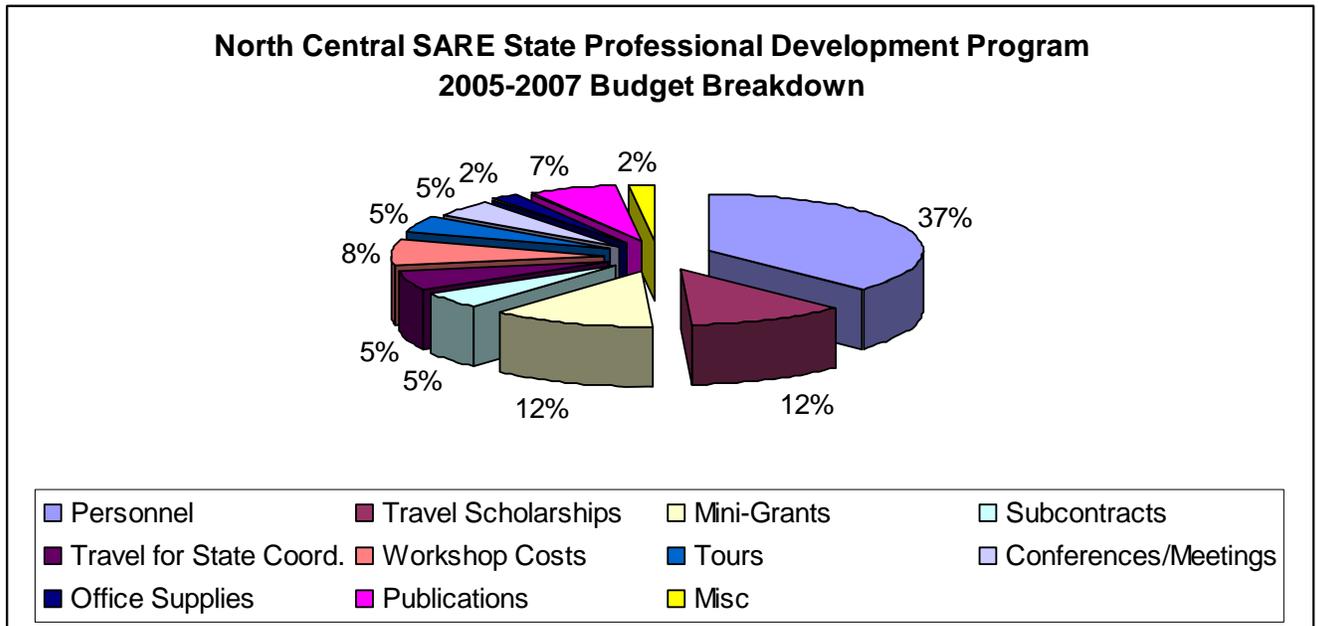
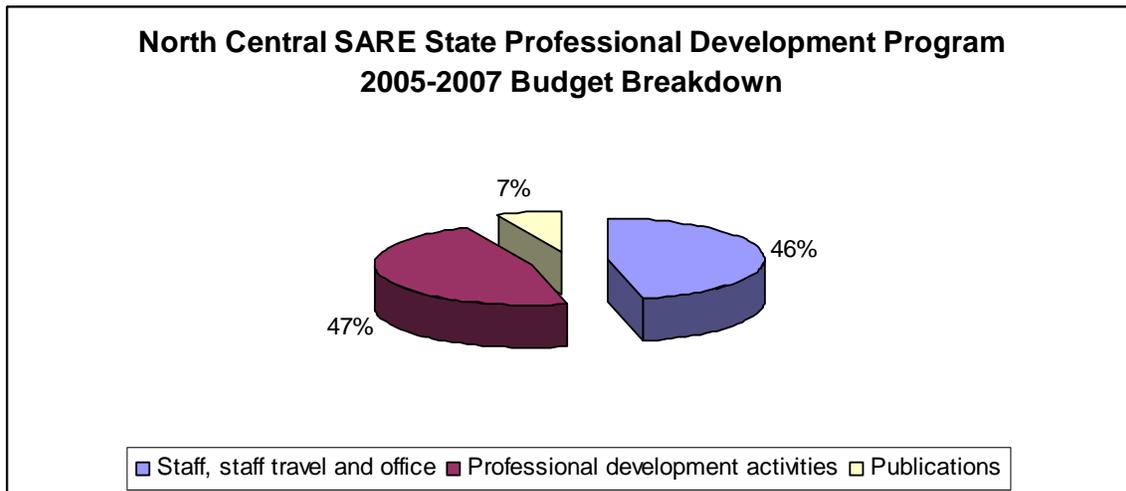


Figure 2. 2005-2007 Broad categories regional budget breakdown



Part II. North Central SARE Extension Educators Survey

Introduction

The North Central SARE Professional Development Program (PDP) administered a survey to extension educators in 2003 to obtain baseline information on educator attitudes, knowledge and practice prior to launching the expanded state professional development program. The survey, which was administered by Surcon International, was web-based and sent to 1175 educators throughout the region. Wisconsin and South Dakota did not take part in the survey. The overall response rate was 49%, for an overall margin of error of 2%.

A decision was made to re-administer the survey in 2006 in order to obtain information for use in the pilot program evaluation. Although both surveys used cross-sectional design, answers from the 2006 survey provide an estimate of educator behavior and practice change within the past three years that can be used to assess the impact of the expanded state program. The original survey served as the basis for this re-administration, but several changes in the survey instrument were made to allow more detailed information to be collected. These changes included specific information on knowledge and practice with better defined response categories, and new questions included to collect information on educator needs and preferences for sustainable agriculture professional development.

Survey description

Survey questions were divided into four primary areas: educator attitudes, knowledge, practice and preferences for professional development. Each area included a series of questions with scale responses. The final survey design was evaluated and

piloted by State Coordinators. The final survey included 56 items and took an average of 12 minutes to complete.

Survey administration

The survey was administered via web-based Axio Survey system on the Kansas State University web site. The initial launch in November, 2006 was a closed survey, with all respondents receiving a unique link to the survey. In several states where response rate was lower than desired, an open survey was launched in which respondents received a general link to the survey. This open link was included in an email that was sent from the State Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Program Leader or from the State Coordinator. Responses from both the open and closed surveys were combined on the state level. Final survey responses included in this analysis were received in April, 2007.

Survey sample frame and response rates

The sample frame for each state was provided by the state coordinator. Sample frames included all extension educators (from county to state specialists) with responsibility in the broad area of agriculture. The sample frame size varied widely between states (see Table 1), largely based on the different structures of state extension systems. Total sample frame was 1323 extension educators in the North Central Region.

A total of 730 complete responses were received, for an overall regional response of 55.18%. This overall response rate allows for interpretation of results with a 2% margin of error. Response rate varied between states, from a low of 30% to a high of 89%. Interpretation of responses at the state level is dependent on initial sample frame size and response rate, with Kansas, Indiana, Missouri and South Dakota having response

rates high enough to allow for interpretation with a 1-2% margin of error. North Dakota, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin's response rates allow for interpretation with a 3% margin of error, while responses from Illinois, Michigan and Nebraska should be interpreted with caution at the state level.

Results and Discussion

Figures contrasting the results obtained from the 2006 survey with those from 2003 are displayed in Figures 1-7. Detailed responses from the 2006 survey are displayed in Figures 8-15.

Educator Attitudes

Questions focused on educator attitudes associated with sustainable agriculture were included in both the 2003 and 2006 surveys. While questions on attitudes can provide some interesting information, interpretation of results can be problematic. For instance, both the 2003 and 2006 surveys included questions about the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable agriculture. In both surveys, a majority of educators agreed with the statements that sustainable agriculture is environmentally sound, economically profitable and socially acceptable. However, fewer educators felt that sustainable agriculture was environmentally sound in 2006 as compared to 2003 (89% vs. 79.5%). There was also a slight (statistically nonsignificant) drop in the percentage of educators who felt that sustainable agriculture was economically profitable or socially acceptable in 2006 as compared to 2003. Fewer educators in 2006, as compared to 2003, reported that sustainable agriculture was practiced in their area. Altogether, these changes may reflect an increase in educator understanding and knowledge about sustainable

agriculture or may reflect changing attitudes about sustainable agriculture, but in the absence of additional information it is difficult to interpret these results.

There was a slight increase in the percentage of educators reporting interest in sustainable agriculture in 2006 as compared to 2003 (81.3 % vs. 78%), and over 78% of educators reported that their university research and extension system was very interested in sustainable agriculture (new question added in 2006). Most importantly, the 2006 survey indicated a 42% increase in the number of educators reporting that farmers are interested in sustainable agriculture. This is a significant finding since farmer interest and demand for information can encourage educator professional development in sustainable agriculture. Although a large number of educators reported that farmers are interested in sustainable agriculture, the majority of educators (76%) perceived that fewer than 50% of farmers were interested in sustainable agriculture.

Educator Knowledge

Within the broad category of educator knowledge, all topic areas (with the exception of agroforestry) experienced significant increases in the percentage of educators reporting having at least beginning knowledge of a topic. The largest increases were seen in local food systems (+48.8%), community development (+37.9%), business planning (+34%) and organics (+32.9%). Slightly smaller, but still statistically significant, increases were seen in alternative marketing (+25.5%), whole farm planning (+24.7%) and managed grazing (+22.2%). Only agroforestry experienced a decline in the number of educators reporting knowledge, with 9.5% fewer educators reporting having introductory-level knowledge in agroforestry in 2006 as compared to 2003.

The inclusion of more detailed response categories in the 2006 survey allow for the clearer delineation of “knowledge” into discrete categories. The levels of knowledge within the survey refer to self-reported ability to deliver programs, with “knowledgeable” and “expert” referring to educators able to independently deliver educational programs in that topic area. Using this system, the percentage of educators who report being in the knowledgeable and expert categories (able to deliver educational programs) is highest for Integrated Pest Management (65.6%) and Management Intensive Grazing (58.5%) and Nutrient Management (55.5%). A significant percentage of educators also reported having enough expertise in community development (42.6%), local food systems (41.8%), and alternative marketing (41.8) to effectively deliver programs and consult with farmers. With respect to gaps in knowledge areas, whole farm planning (17.3%), alternative marketing (14.5%) and nutrient management (13.2%) were the content areas in which educators reported having no or little knowledge of the topic.

These results indicate that a sizeable proportion of educators are comfortable enough in many topic areas to conduct educational programs for the general public and farmers. Perhaps even more importantly, when including the “beginner” category (those who know where to get more information and resources) a sizeable majority of educators are in a position to assist farmers and others in getting information and adopting sustainable agriculture practices.

Educator Practice

The 2006 survey results indicated a significant increase in the number of sustainable agriculture programs provided to different groups in the past two years, as compared to 2003. The largest increase (in terms of target audience) was seen in

sustainable agriculture educational programs targeted to the general public, with over 74% of educators delivering at least two sustainable agriculture programs in the previous two years. Increases were also seen in the number of educators providing at least two programs to traditional farm organizations, traditionally underserved audiences (18.1%), and small farmers (11.1%).

Increases were also observed in educator participation in SARE Professional Development workshops (+6.5%), SARE meetings (+4.2%), and SARE tours (+3.4%) in 2006 as compared to 2003. Educator involvement in SARE research and education (+4%) and SARE farmer/rancher grants (+2%) also experienced an increase in 2006 as compared to 2003. Educators reported a slight (but statistically nonsignificant) increase in their use of SARE/SAN materials.

In terms of detailed information on educator practice, it is clear that a minority of educators provide multiple (>6) programs on sustainable agriculture to both the general public and key target audiences. A slight majority of educators (52.9%) delivered no sustainable agriculture education programs to socially underserved audiences. With respect to sustainable agriculture programs delivered to peers, the results from these questions are difficult to interpret since it is likely that some educators were unable to differentiate between programs delivered to peers and those delivered to other educators.

Educators also report significant partnering activities in their delivery of sustainable agriculture programs. A majority of educators report partnering at least one time with sustainable agriculture farm groups, individual farmers, NRCS and traditional farm groups. In terms of educators who partner frequently (>6 times), educators report partnering with NRCS (29.6%), individual farmers (20.4%) and traditional farmer

organizations (15.2%), as compared to partnering with sustainable agriculture organizations (7.4%) and the state coordinator (5.4%). As knowledge of state sustainable agriculture programs and sustainable agriculture organizations increases among extension educators, it would be expected that more extension educators will partner with these groups.

In terms of using information resources in sustainable agriculture, most educators rely heavily upon their own university research system with over 48% of educators getting information from their own university over 10 times in the past two years. The second most frequently used information resource is SAN/SARE which was relied on at least 3 times in the past two years by over 37% of educators. A sizeable proportion of educators have used non-governmental organizations (61.8%), state coordinators (43%) and Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) (43%) at least one time for information in the past two years. In contrast, only 16.7% of educators report using the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) for information on sustainable agriculture.

Educator Needs and Preferences

The survey instrument was expanded to include questions associated with needs and preference for sustainable agriculture professional development. In terms of preferred professional development, educators report that tours and farm visits are the most useful (63.1%), followed by workshops (60.7%), conferences (49.8%) and newsletters (44.7%) in terms of usefulness of professional development activities. An on-line course was reported as useful by the smallest number of educators (27.5%).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although these surveys provide only cross-sectional information on educator attitudes, knowledge and behavior, it is clear from the results that the landscape associated with sustainable agriculture has changed substantially in the past three years. This changed landscape is probably best reflected in the substantial increase in the number of educators who report that farmers are interested in sustainable agriculture. Along with the increased awareness that farmers are interested in sustainable agriculture, is recognition by most educators that land grant universities are also very interested in sustainable agriculture. While we cannot unequivocally assert that these changes are due to the increased presence of the SARE professional development program within states, we can reasonably infer that the pilot SARE PDP program did contribute to these positive educator outcomes.

Educator knowledge in sustainable agriculture practices and topics has also significantly increased over the past three years, with the vast majority of educators possessing at least beginning knowledge (able to access resources) of salient sustainable agriculture topics. It is also clear from the survey data in 2006, that a cadre of extension educators with expertise in sustainable agriculture are delivering multiple programs across the North Central Region. Encouraging this group of educators to train peers may provide an important opportunity to expand sustainable agriculture programming.

Concomitant with the increase in educator knowledge is an increase in the number of educators who are providing sustainable agriculture programs to the general public, underserved audiences, and farmers. However, based on the survey data, it is clear that continued efforts to increase programming to underserved audiences is needed. An

opportunity may exist to increase programming to these audiences by encouraging partnering with sustainable agriculture and other non-profit organizations throughout the North Central Region.

Lastly, with respect to future SARE professional development efforts, the identification of farm tours and conferences as the most useful tools for professional development suggests that the SARE PDP should continue its efforts to provide experiential opportunities for extension educators interested in sustainable agriculture. Additionally, these experiential types of opportunities (including workshops) also provide an important venue in which extension educators can directly interact with farmers (including underserved audiences), which provides additional encouragement to educators to provide educational programming to the general public, peers, and farmers and ranchers throughout the North Central Region.

Table 1. Sample frame size, response rate and notes on survey method, by state.

State	Sample frame	Responses	Response rate (%)	Notes
Illinois	179	58	32.40	closed administration
Indiana	86	67	77.91	closed and open administration
Iowa	112	55	49.11	closed administration
Kansas	126	113	89.68	closed and open administration
Michigan	139	42	30.22	closed administration
Minnesota	46	24	52.17	closed administration
Missouri	160	116	72.50	closed and open administration
Nebraska	86	26	30.23	closed and open administration
North Dakota	49	28	57.14	closed and open administration
Ohio	87	42	48.28	closed and open administration
South Dakota	53	40	75.47	closed and open administration
Wisconsin	203*	119	58.62	closed and open administration – *change in sample frame
Total	1326	730	55.18	

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- Figure 2.** Educator, farmer and university interest in sustainable agriculture, 2003 compared to 2006.
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- Figure 4.** Educators knowledge of sustainable agriculture topics, 2003 compared to 2006.
- Figure 5.** Educators providing two or more sustainable agriculture programs to specific groups in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.
- Figure 6.** Educators reporting using sustainable agriculture resources in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.
- Figure 7.** Participation in SARE-sponsored events in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.

The following figures include detailed descriptions of results obtained from 2006 survey:

- Figure 8.** Educator interest in sustainable agriculture, 2006.
- Figure 9.** Percentage of farmers educators perceive are interested in sustainable agriculture, 2006.
- Figure 10.** Educator knowledge in sustainable production practices, 2006.
- Figure 11.** Educator knowledge of sustainable agriculture topics, 2006.
- Figure 12.** Sustainable agriculture programs in the past two years targeted to groups, 2006.
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- Figure 14.** Partnering to conduct sustainable agriculture programs over the last two years, 2006.
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- Figure 16.** Utility of sustainable agriculture professional development activities, 2006.

Figure 1. Educator attitudes regarding the prevalence, economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable agriculture, 2003 compared to 2006.

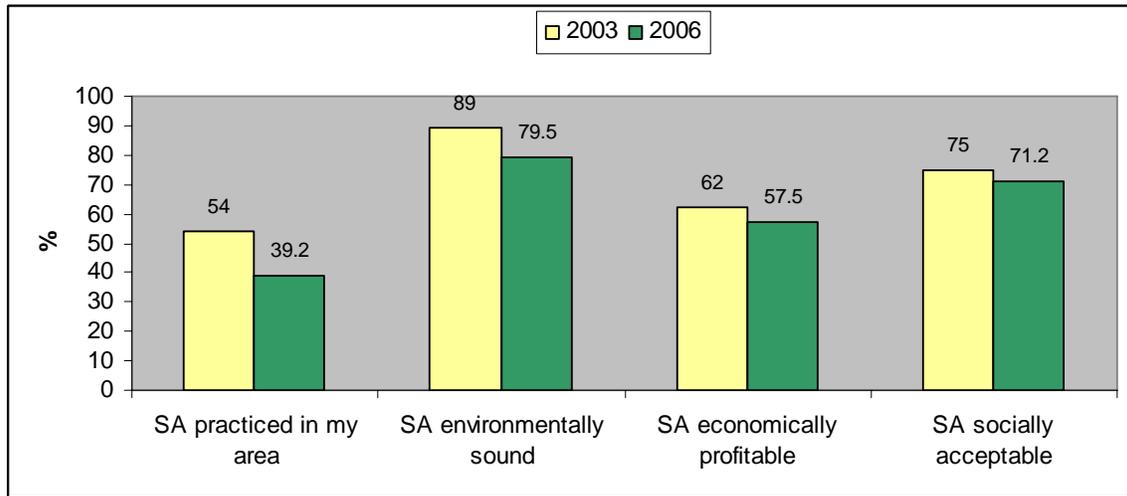


Figure 2. Educator, farmer and university interest in sustainable agriculture, 2003 compared to 2006.

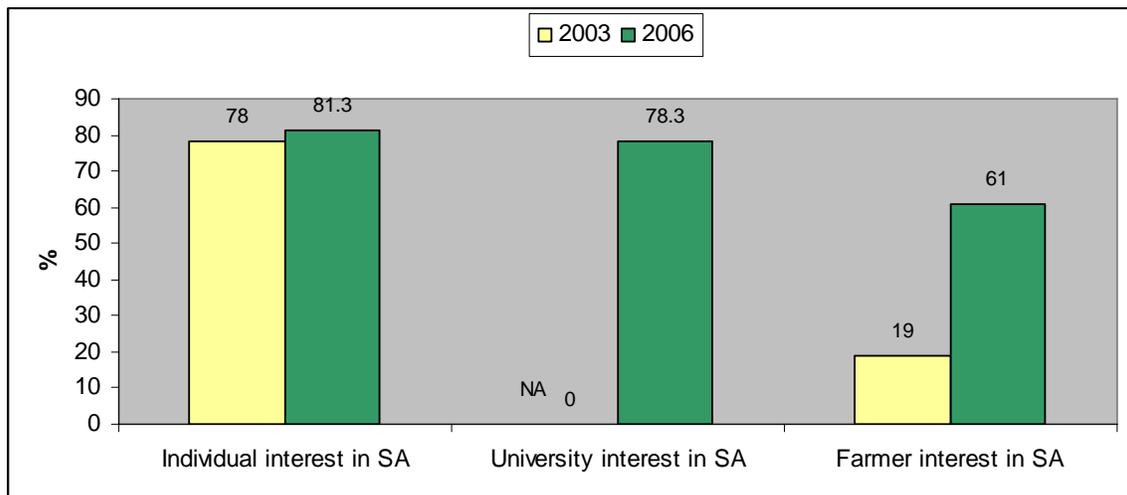


Figure 3. Educator knowledge of sustainable agriculture production practices, 2003 compared to 2006.

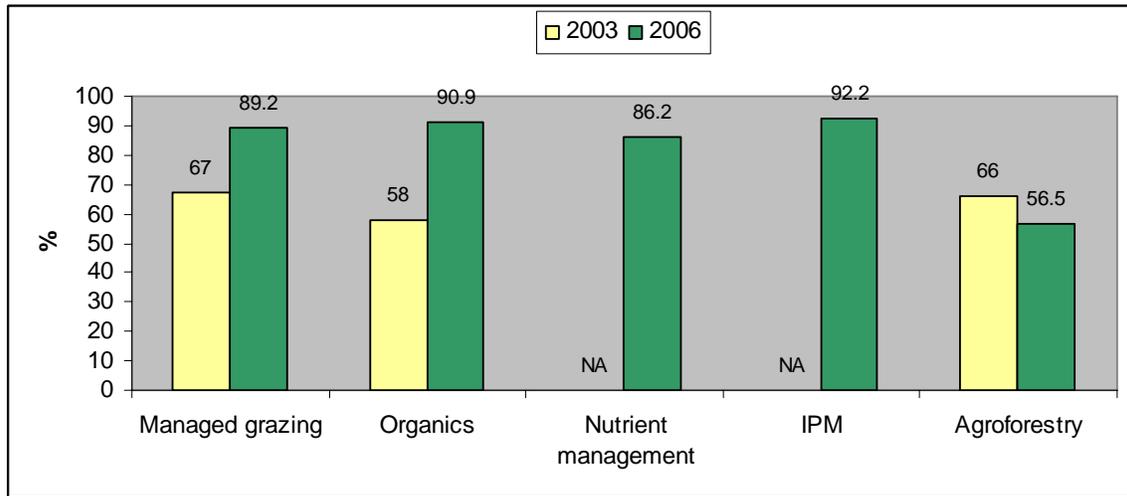


Figure 4. Educators knowledge of sustainable agriculture topics, 2003 compared to 2006.

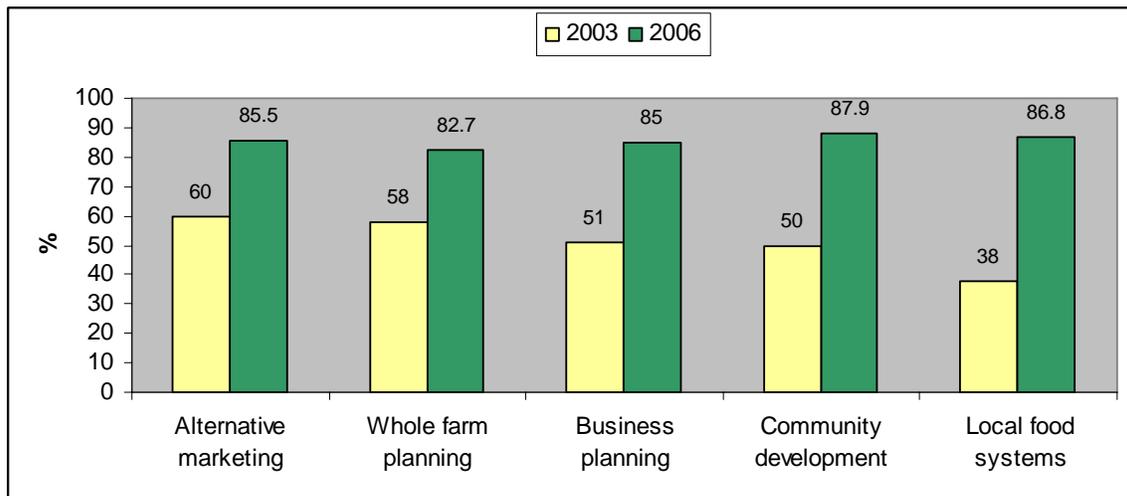


Figure 5. Educators providing two or more sustainable agriculture programs to specific groups in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.

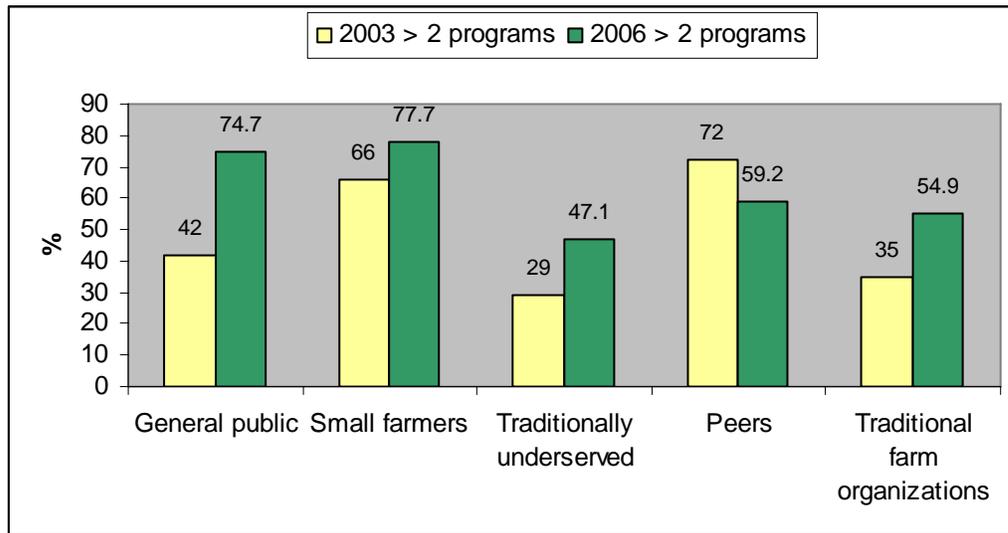


Figure 6. Educators reporting using sustainable agriculture resources in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.

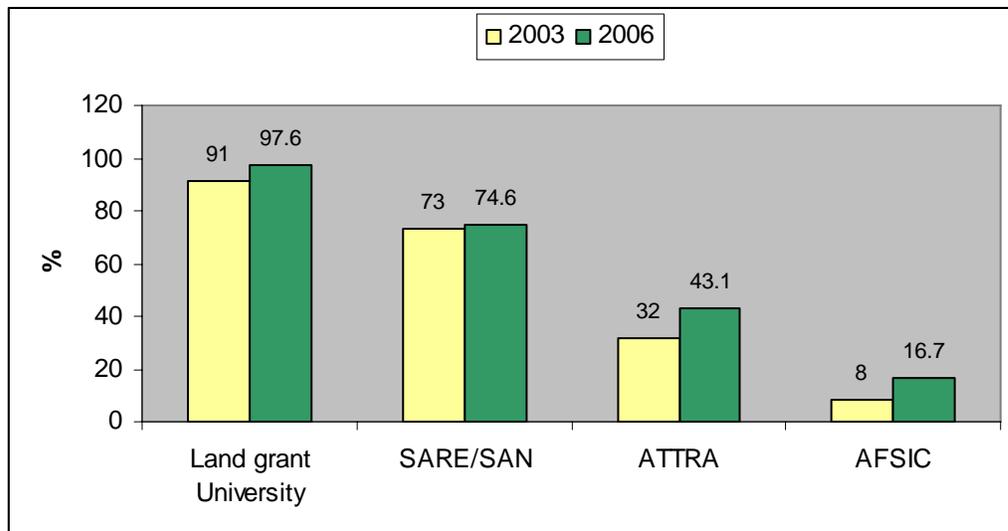


Figure 7. Participation in SARE-sponsored events in the past two years, 2003 compared to 2006.

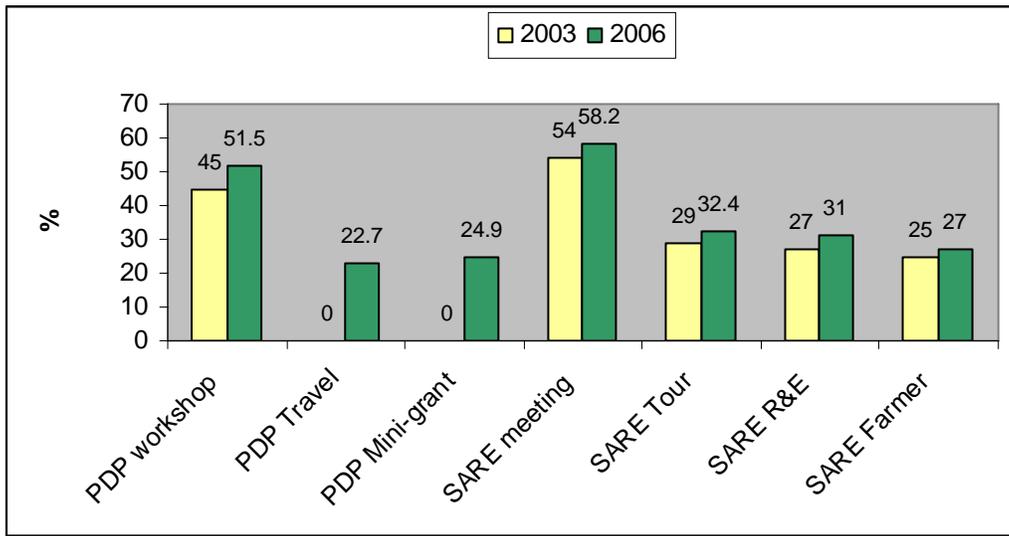


Figure 8. Educator interest in sustainable agriculture, 2006.

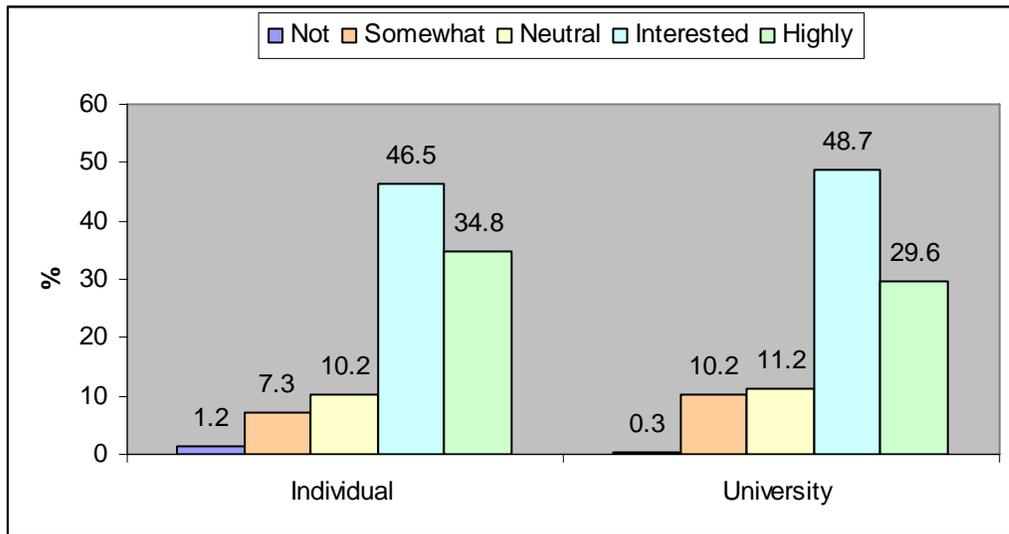


Figure 9. Percentage of farmers educators perceive are interested in sustainable agriculture, 2006.

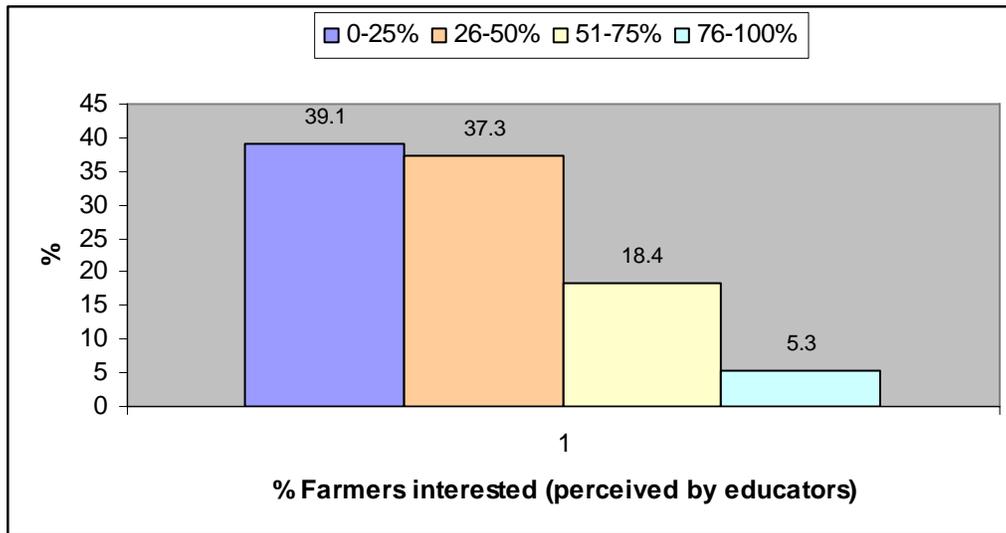


Figure 10. Educator knowledge in sustainable agriculture production practices, 2006.

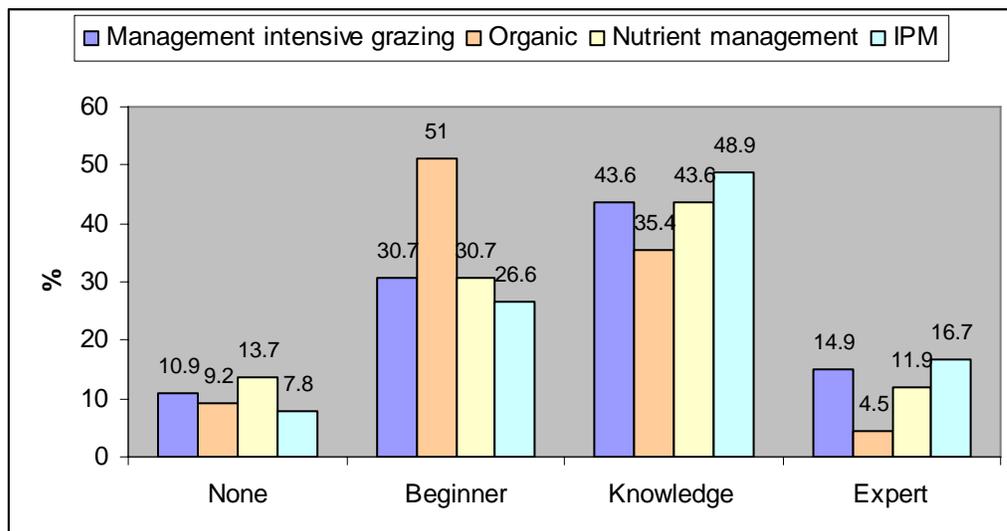


Figure 11. Educator knowledge of sustainable agriculture topics, 2006.



Figure 12. Sustainable agriculture programs in the past two years targeted to groups, 2006.

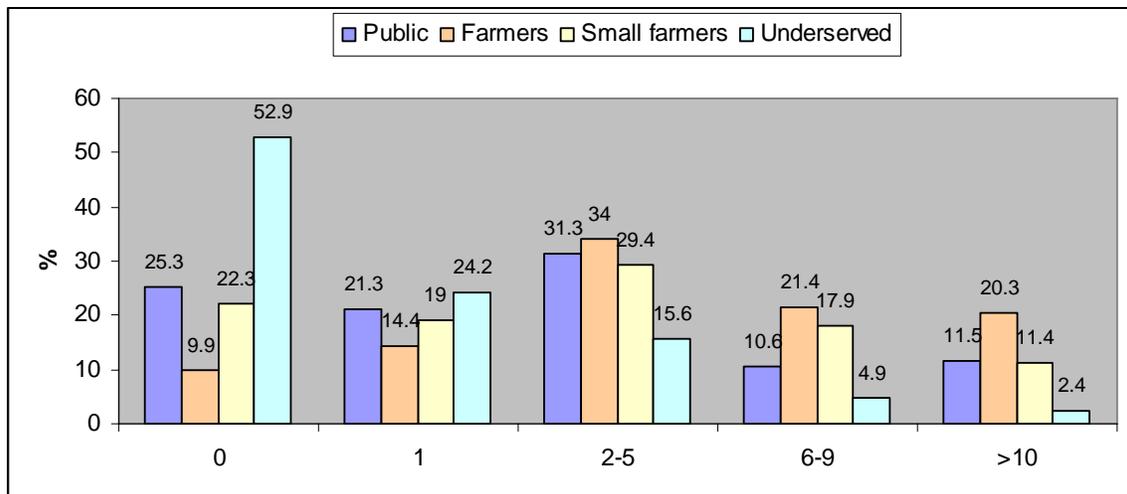


Figure 13. Sustainable agriculture programs in the past two years targeted to organizations, 2006.

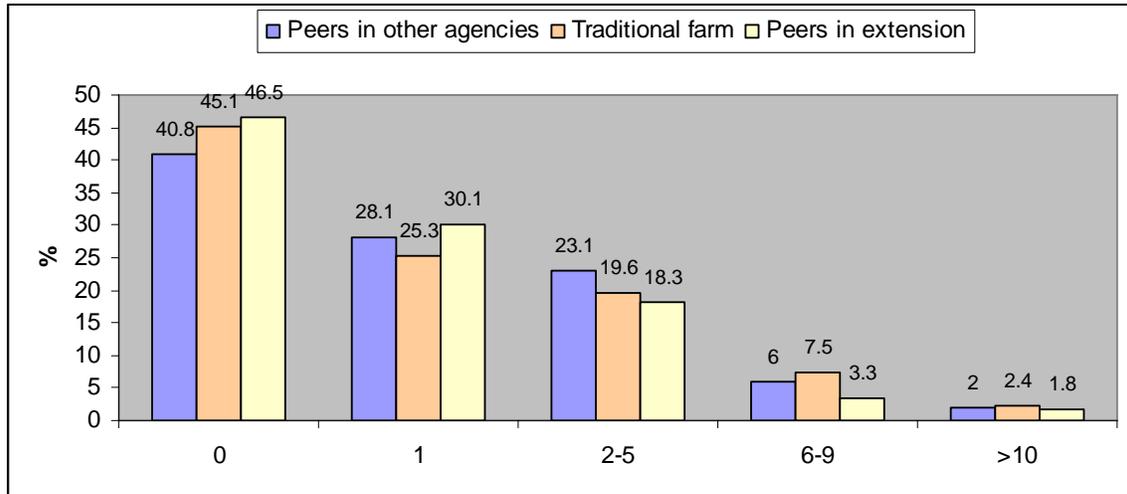


Figure 14. Partnering to conduct sustainable agriculture programs over the last two years, 2006.

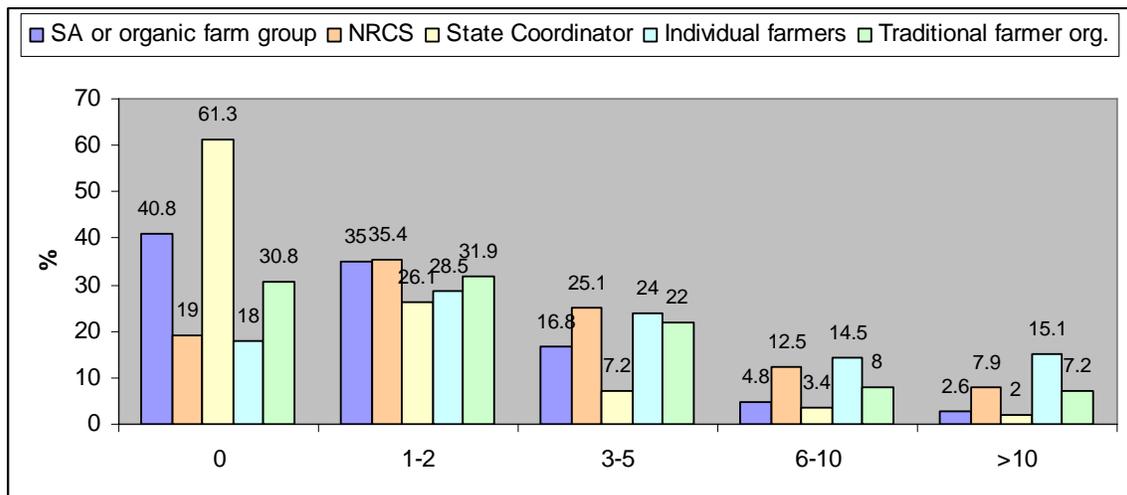


Figure 15. Resources used in sustainable agriculture programming over the last two years, 2006.

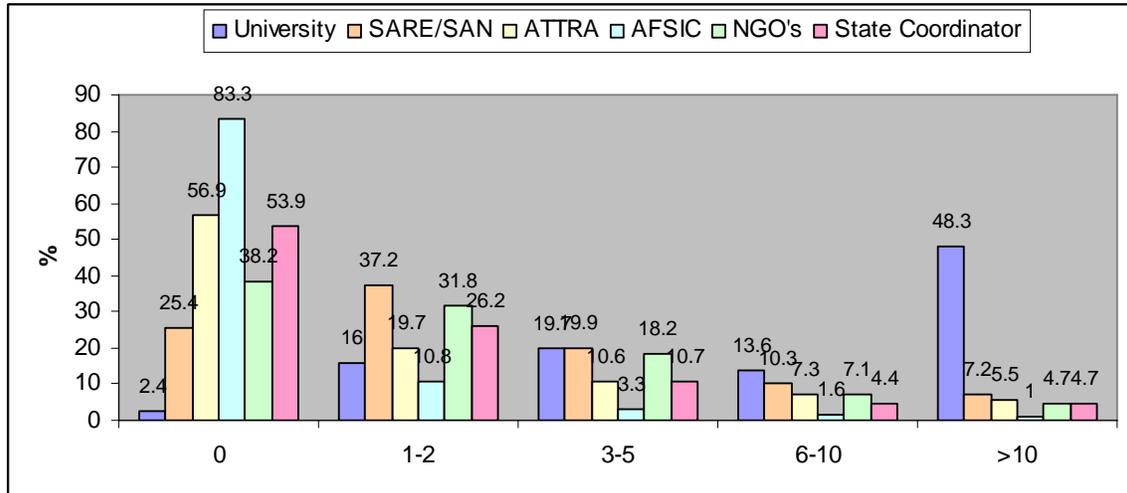
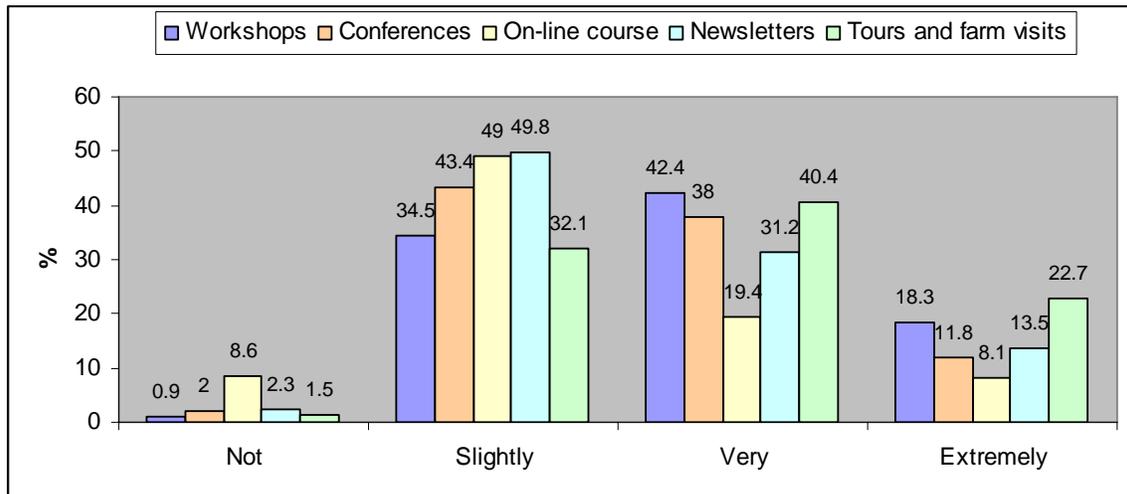


Figure 16. Utility of professional development activities, 2006



Part III. North Central SARE State Coordinator Perceptions

Introduction

As part of the evaluation of the North Central SARE Professional Development Program, State Coordinators were contacted for interviews about their experience with the professional development pilot project. Some states in the region have more than one person administering the program and in at least one state the coordinator position is in transition. Thus, 14 professionals are involved in administering the program, 11 of whom were interviewed. The interviews were semi-structured with the same set of four open-ended questions asked of each state coordinator. All persons interviewed received an e-mail copy of the questions prior to the interview. The interviewer did rephrase questions during the interview when necessary to clarify the range of responses acceptable. For example, the phrase “Do you have any unmet needs or opportunities . . .” was sometimes replaced with “What are your frustrations . . .” and with “What would your ‘wish’ list be?”

Overall, the state coordinators see the change in the program as a positive one, although not perfect. Common topics throughout the interviews were the increased reporting requirements, the increased awareness and participation that has occurred, and the need for ongoing support for the state coordinators. There was consensus that the expanded program has generated positive results, they have all the record-keeping they can handle, further expansion of the program (to offer programming on additional topics) will require additional people, and that by not offering direct delivery to producers opportunities are being lost.

The coordinators generally described discrete positive and negative aspects of the expanded program. There were however, incidents of contradictory experiences or incidents when coordinators experienced a result that had both a positive and negative effect – the ‘not perfect’ aspect. Conflicting comments from two coordinators demonstrates this incongruous

result. “There are increased opportunities, but people are not really taking advantage of them; participation is low” (*this same coordinator also reported that while participation was low it was higher than before expanding the program*) versus, “People are more aware of opportunities and are using them.” Other comments supporting the ‘not perfect’ aspect of the program expressed frustration that the state coordinator is “now recognized as the sustainable ag person in extension agriculture circles, but an increase in sustainable practices has not really been seen.” And that even with expansion the program is “not meeting all the education needs, but we are reaching those interested in specific topics.” The negative aspects of the expanded program focused on time, evaluation, and direct delivery. The negative comments were generally indicators of the program not going far enough rather than indicating it was not working. Overall, the coordinators “like the way program is being administered.”

Opportunities

Initiating the expanded program created some almost immediate opportunities and positive results for the program. The most common of these direct benefits occurred in four areas: identifying audience needs, planning and flexibility, increasing awareness and acceptance, and increasing activities. The expanded program gave state coordinators a stronger mandate and additional resources with which to accomplish it, “With the expanded program we are doing more activities, organizing more events, more public targeting of educators and helping educators go to conferences, meetings, and trainings.”

A notable change discussed throughout the 11 interviews related to the amount of awareness and participation in professional development activities. Although awareness and participation varied among their respective states, all coordinators reported an increase. In addition to identifying more awareness and reaching larger audiences, they also commented, “people using SARE funds are quite enthused.” Specific comments included:

Expanding the program allowed us to go from nonparticipating to a dynamic program. Now we have a lot of educators actively involved in the program—it's been a dramatic turnaround.

The expanded program helped to bring different groups and educators together in a powerful way.

Because of the pilot program, professional development has increased effectiveness and impact within the state despite diminishing resources.

Professional development is more targeted; we know better what the needs are.

A little money spurs further fundraising and is more effective. It creates “ownership”; it allows us to do more with less.

Two coordinators also described the expanded program as contributing to a “huge” institutional change between State Research and Extension and SARE resulting in “better connections, more idea sharing, more interest in sustainable ag, less resistance, better understanding.” One comment expressed the opinion that while the change has allowed expanded programming, “the job [itself] has not changed as a result.” Another view expressed was that the “job is more complex and complicated” and while it is “difficult to get ag educators into sustainable agriculture . . . This is starting to change, there are more people interested this year than last year”

The increased level of activity has resulted in improved communication and cooperation, especially between SARE and Research and Extension. As one state coordinator said, “Barriers between agencies are breaking down.” This has meant coordinators have found out more specifically what Agriculture Extension Agents need to know and can plan trainings to meet those needs or help those agents get to needed trainings offered elsewhere. Characteristic of comments describing increased activity is this comment:

The increased awareness and visibility has led to an increase in the number of questions about sustainable agriculture. Misconceptions still exist about what sustainable agriculture is. The money provided a teaching opportunity. Now I interact with 80 percent of the county ag agents. I can talk to them about a particular practice or need in their county.

Increased awareness and activities has led to more invitations for the state coordinators to participate in mainstream agricultural conferences and events. One said, “I’m seeing offers to do presentations in more mainstream conferences and unexpectedly getting invited back.” Another comment was, “Organic or sustainable agriculture used to be laughed at. More and more it is being accepted as legitimate. More and more mainstream organizations are accepting us.” A third comment was, “The changes have caused an awakening in the state about sustainable agriculture . . . and now include more educators that were previously not aware of it.”

Regarding planning and flexibility the characteristic comment was, “The money gives us flexibility to not depend on competitive grants or small projects, and that allows us to change with producer needs more easily.” The change also allows the coordinators to engage in longer-term plans rather than being limited to year-to-year plans, “We can establish a routine of offering something every year and cover different topics. Educators have come to expect it.”

The change in the program has meant that the state coordinators now have a better awareness of what their clientele need and they have better access to community groups through better relations with Research and Extension. One described the change as:

There is a lot more consistency and accountability with the expanded program. Coordinators are in a position to know what we’ve accomplished. Before, it was “by the seat of our pants.” Now we have better tracking and accounting, which allows us to know where money makes a difference. It also makes grant recipients more intentional. The quality and number of applications for grants has improved.

The additional resources provide for a more unified training program. And, awareness is reaching new audiences of both producers and educators, enabling coordinators to “work with other grant programs that are more in tune with us.”

Although the expanded program has allowed state coordinators to do more, it has also helped them see more clearly the areas in which the program is not making progress.

Generally, the coordinators see potential opportunities for the program through more

work with youth and direct delivery to farmers. The coordinators believe the expanded program's mandate to train the trainer substantially limits their efforts. The following comment illustrates the predominant view:

The majority of funds can't be spent on direct farmer outreach. Many times, I could be more effective going directly to the farmer, but the funds are tightly controlled and our mandate is to train the trainer. That (mandate) has made it hard to get funds to continue successful programs. We need more support for direct farmer outreach – either less control of existing funds or more funds so we have a way to go direct to the farmer.

Although the coordinators see common opportunities in these general areas, specific opportunities vary among the states. The coordinators see existing opportunities to reach youth through teachers in high school vocational agriculture programs, through 4-H leaders, and through university internship programs, “Internships would get college students onto farms and ranches that are finding sustainable alternatives.” The coordinators also see potential opportunities with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United States Department of Agriculture agencies (USDA), other agencies that may be working with new immigrant populations, as well as direct delivery to new immigrants and people new to farming. One coordinator explained:

NGO and agency educators are not participating very much. The program changed a lot for extension educators but not for other educators. We can design programs to meet the needs of these other educators – like USDA agencies. In order to get them to participate; we need to meet their needs.

Coordinators also acknowledged that despite the expanded program they are not reaching the educators working with underserved populations, “The program changed a lot for extension educators but not a lot for other educators.” The coordinators acknowledge that SARE encourages them to work with diverse audiences, but as one put it, “There is a conflict in that we get diversity training, but then are restricted to training educators, who are not a diverse audience.” Other comments on diversity included:

We need to work more with different audiences with different disciplines. We need to target audiences that are culturally capable, non-traditional farmers, minority farmers, and women.

There's a lot to be done, especially as demographics change and more people become farmers. They need to be exposed to sustainable agriculture. They are working with NGOs, so SARE needs to work more with those agencies.

SARE has taken a couple of good steps, but there needs to be a strong institutional commitment. There has been a focus on traditional farmers rather than working with minority farmers and now there needs to be a concerted effort to reach them.

New legislation with the upcoming Farm Bill was discussed as a potential opportunity, "The Farm Bill could be a good thing for sustainable agriculture. It is likely to open many doors, but SARE is not poised to take advantage of those opportunities."

Another identified cause of missed opportunity was the idea that the concept of sustainable agriculture is not clearly defined. One coordinator expressed, "There is not a single definition of sustainable and that creates problems. With a narrow definition, a number of producers could be left out."

For some of the coordinators, the concept of sustainable agriculture has reached the "tipping point." As one commented, "The community has the interest. The demand for information is outstripping production."

Support

Just as the expanded program allowed coordinators to see gaps in program delivery, it also let surface the type and amount of support that is necessary to keep up with the expanded program. Personnel, continuity and consistency, time and time management, professional development for the state coordinators, and networking and cooperation opportunities were common topics discussed under this theme.

The expanded program has demonstrated what a person in the state coordinator position can do with consistent resources. Three key points were brought out in the interviews: people,

longevity, and continuity. The insights about people that coordinators shared were that although “the expanded program created wider recognition of sustainable agriculture, there is greater recognition when there is a dedicated person and there is consistency.” Another comment made the point that “the web site and mailings are not the same as having a person in the room.”

While recognizing the progress the expanded program has brought about, the coordinators also recognize the path still ahead of them, and that the program was a pilot project. They expressed the need for longevity, “I hope it’s a long-term program. Programs need time to make a difference.” With the expanded program, the state coordinators have some confidence that the program will continue despite personnel changes.” One coordinator posed the question, “When the person in a position changes, what happens to continuity of programs and efforts? How much support will continue to go to those efforts?” Another comment was, “Let’s stay the course. We finally have professional development figured out; I’d like for it to continue.” Another aspect of continuity is institutional. As one said, “Not only is continuity a SARE thing, but also a host institution issue. If SARE would show that it is committed, then that sends a message to the host institution.”

Another piece of support of course is funding. To see the progress continue, continued funding is required as one coordinator expressed:

Not only is funding important for state coordinators but also for the regional coordinator. The program needs to be more than just the person leading it. There has to be enough money for the positions so that if there is a personnel change the program continues at the same quality level.

The coordinators also expressed both some concern and optimism about funding. Without continued funding, there is concern that the program “may or may not continue depending on the passion of the person in the position.” But also, the pilot program has increased openness and interest in sustainable agriculture “across the board” and “professional development has

increased effectiveness and impact within the states despite diminishing resources.” There is

more anxiety about resources as coordinators see fewer people in county extension positions. They see themselves as “struggling to provide professional development to educators who are struggling with limited resources as well.”

The issue of funding varies throughout the region, as does the time commitment of the state coordinators. Depending on their own situation, the coordinators have different access to funds for direct delivery of programming to producers. With the money from the program committed to salary and professional development, several coordinators expressed a need for “money for programming to producers.”

Not all state coordinators have equivalent positions; some are full time and others part time. While some expressed being “overwhelmed with work, behind with paperwork, and working long hours for a long time,” others with dual work assignments expressed concern about “not have enough time to meet demands of both assignments.” Other concerns expressed were that state coordinators “are putting in a lot of time, more time than SARE is paying for, and are getting burned out” and “Time is an issue. My time is maxed out. Another staff person is needed in order to expand the program in more topics.” Time management is also an issue especially concerning evaluation. The coordinators need to “find ways to make paper work more efficient” so coordinators can “talk more with people.”

The coordinators discussed their need for professional development along with more opportunities for networking and cooperation among themselves. The opinion was also expressed that training for state coordinators needs to come from a source more knowledgeable than they are. The comment was, “If training comes from colleagues rather than a state specialist it doesn’t have as much legitimacy.” Needs in improving day-to-day skills were also identified, “We need to know or have training on facilitation, conflict resolution, and technology (i.e., the software program used for the evaluation forms). We need some professional development in

diversity training; we need the skills to approach these other audiences.” Other daily needs discussed were needs for “more organizational skills” and because “The program changes requirements for reporting a great deal, we need training to do the paperwork.” Several coordinators also identified the need for training on the newest research and sharing the results.

One coordinator explained:

“There has been a move away from region-wide meetings and educational training opportunities and interstate travel is not always feasible. What are the advances in sustainable agriculture that we don’t know about? We need our own professional development. We need to keep up.”

With the expanded program, grant applications are more competitive and coordinators want to know about and share the results. They explained:

Ideally, the grant process builds relationships and networks. It allows a coordinator to attend meetings where results are presented with no real responsibilities, and we can find out about new research and have time to network. I would like to be able to invest travel time to go to regional meetings.

I would like more time with the other state coordinators. It is beneficial, sharing ideas, brainstorming, being able to talk more one on one with another coordinator, to get support and encouragement.

As it is, state coordinators have meetings two times a year, they’re rushed. So there is not enough time; you don’t see the materials each coordinator has.

Evaluation

As a group, the coordinators reported the greatest change in their job has been the amount of record keeping required to document how support funds are spent. And while the consensus was that the reporting was cumbersome, it was not entirely negative. A comment illustrative of the general opinion:

The biggest change is the obligation for all the reporting, it becomes this onerous thing, but it’s positive because state coordinators make better decisions and it demands us to be more effective with time management. I’ve learned I’m being effective, and being busy does not mean being effective.

The state coordinators acknowledge that the feedback they have received from the educators they trained is good. They know what the educators need, however they feel “documentation has reached its limit, a point of diminishing returns.” And, “It is so extensive it has become an item to include in our plan of work.” Another expressed, “The reporting and evaluation component is at a maximum for the money. My state has more than demonstrated the impacts. The evaluation procedures need to adapt to the administrators questions, not just add on more areas to report on.” Other comments were, “We need an easier way to do reporting” and “Having the information is good, but I can’t afford an increase in time to go to more reporting. Change and refine the reporting process; don’t ask for more information, ask for different information.”

Conclusions

Consensus in the North Central SARE region about the expanded professional development program is that it has been positive and beneficial, if not perfect. Knowing funding was available enabled coordinators to make longer-range plans, engage in projects that were longer than a year in length, and generally expand their activities. Most found the funding to be adequate, especially considering their time commitments. Additional funding would require more time in order to spend it – time most of them don’t have. The major constraints coordinators feel they are struggling with are the amounts of reporting they do and that their direct outreach to producers is limited. The expanded program has demonstrated how much they can accomplish with minimum resources. They perceive sustainable agriculture as being on the brink of becoming a substantial part of mainstream agriculture. They are encouraged by the interest and enthusiasm they have seen generated throughout their region.

About the author

Terrie Clark is a PhD student in Sociology at Kansas State University and her interest lies in rural and environmental issues. Her educational background is in Environmental Studies, Journalism and Mass Communication. Her professional work has been predominantly in agricultural-related areas.