

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.