

Diversity and SARE in the North Central Region

Preamble:

Communities in the North Central Region continue to change, with representatives of different cultures regularly being added to an already diverse population. We know that cultural and economic barriers exist that prevent some in the region, new and established alike, from working with the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program to achieve our common sustainability goals. Since we see sustainable agriculture as an important issue for all of the citizens of the North Central Region (NCR), we feel that it is incumbent upon us to identify any barriers that prevent participation by everyone who is interested in working to help push forward this process of change and then to promote fuller participation with the SARE program in our region. Toward this goal, we strongly suggest that NCR-SARE review its programs and processes in an on-going manner to improve the relevance and accessibility to all the citizens of the North Central Region. We strongly suggest that NCR-SARE commit to building strong relationships with existing programs and organizations that currently serve those that may be underserved by NCR-SARE. We strongly suggest that NCR-SARE act as a change agent to build cultural competency within the region from the regional down to the individual level for all involved with SARE. In the end, increased diversity among those planning, carrying out and being served by the SARE program in the North Central Region is a positive attribute that we feel will help make sustainable agriculture more broadly accepted and more widely practiced.

Goals:

- 1) **Full and active participation of underserved groups¹ in NCR-SARE.**
- 2) **Learning and growing from an ever deeper understanding of cultural differences.**

We will know we have made progress toward our long term goals when....

I. Anyone who wants to apply for a grant has the information and ability to do so.

Possible Actions to move toward this outcome:

- Identify segments of our population interested in sustainable agriculture who are not currently involved in our programs and decision-making process.

1. Underserved groups: Individuals and groups who have not participated in or have received limited benefits from USDA programs which may improve their quality of life and/or the environment. Examples of historically underserved are farmers/ranchers and landowners/operators with limited resources, minority groups (including American Indians, Alaskan Natives and Aleuts), women, and the physically challenged. Underserved farmers may also include small farmers, organic farmers, and other farmers with production practices that are different from most farmers in the area. Underserved non-farmers may include members of religious and ethnic groups, and rural and urban communities which can benefit from USDA programs and technical assistance. [Paraphrased from NRCS Outreach Division <http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/about/outreach/underserved.html>]

- Identify underserved groups that can assist NCR-SARE and develop a mechanism for engaging those groups in achieving those goals.
- Identify current barriers for people interested in sustainable agriculture who are currently not being served by NCR-SARE.
- Reduce or eliminate barriers for people interested in sustainable agriculture.
- Help to build a network of organizations throughout the region and within communities that can help serve people who are interested in and are practicing sustainable agriculture.

II. The membership of our committees (our decision-making process) is representative of the communities of people practicing sustainable agriculture.

Possible actions to move toward this outcome:

- Identify various ways different underserved groups can meaningfully interact with NCR-SARE.
- Develop a mechanism with the Administrative Council (AC) for tracking demographics of our constituents, not just who is currently served by the programs, but who are the members of the sustainable agriculture community that do not have representation on the committees.
- Actively recruit qualified committee members from underrepresented communities.
- Increase partnerships and relationship building with organizations that include people of color/ethnic minorities.

III. NCR-SARE welcomes perspectives of people of diverse backgrounds, cultural and economic, and encourages their participation in our programs and decision-making processes.

Possible actions to move toward this outcome:

- Conduct focus groups with members of underserved groups in the region to identify new approaches for communications and outreach that would feel more inclusive and welcoming.
- Increase the number of materials available for non-English speaking people.
- Create a process for underserved groups to critique our program goals, design, and outcomes.

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IV. A greater diversity and number of people, contributing to, and embracing sustainable agriculture.

Possible actions to move toward this outcome:

- We could be asking grantees to be tracking, qualitatively or by proportion, ethnic backgrounds of people who make up the community they are working with for outreach.

- In the grant application, ask grant applicants to describe the ethnicity of the community within which they will be conducting their outreach. We could then determine if a special effort should be made, either by NCR-SARE or by the grantee, to reach diverse constituents in the community with which they are working. With this approach, at least we would have a qualitative way to describe who may be receiving outreach through our programs.

V. We no longer need the Diversity Committee or the Diversity Grant Program.

Actions to move us toward this outcome:

- Establish mechanisms that are a part of the way NCR-SARE functions that keep us on track with our goals.