SOUTHERN SARE Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education

Changes in Southern SARE's Research and Education Grants Program

Bringing Systems Research into Focus

Since their inception in 1988, SARE's Research and Education grants have focused on complex agricultural systems. Research and Education projects basically study interactions among components of a given system to determine how that system performs. This systems approach to research is expensive and requires a longer time frame than the usual two- or three-year grant cycle. SARE recognizes that foundation work has to be in place before a systems research project can be undertaken.

For researchers who are not yet ready to apply for a systems research project, Southern SARE's Research and Education grants now offer funding for **planning** projects or **preliminary** research projects.

Research and Education Planning Grants bring together interdisciplinary, multi-institutional teams to define a project scope, establish goals and objectives, perform literature reviews across disciplines and do other tasks necessary for developing a systems research preproposal. Planning grants award up to $20,000 for one year's planning activities. Pre-proposals are not required.

A **planning** grant will pay for personnel time and resources to convene planning meetings, hold conference calls or otherwise facilitate communication among team members. These grants can also support travel for scouting research locations on university property or on farms. The team can visit research sites where similar research has taken place.

A successful planning project may culminate in the submission of a full-scale systems proposal. However a planning project may discover that additional research data is needed before the team can submit a full-scale systems proposal. In that case, the team would apply for a **preliminary** research grant to fill in the knowledge gap.

Research and Education Preliminary Grants conduct necessary research that would feed into the interdisciplinary team's objectives. It is likely that such a missing link would be discovered during the literature review of a Research and Education Project. For example, a consumer survey may need to be conducted before designing a local food system project. Or before a grazing system for small ruminants can be evaluated in a systems-scale project, researchers must find a parasite management program that will fit into such a system. If there isn't a body of research prescribing effective non-chemical controls for intestinal parasites, the research team would apply for a preliminary grant instead of a systems-scale grant. The preliminary grant would pay for experiments using garlic capsules, lespedeza forage, papaya enzyme and other alternative parasite treatments. Preliminary grants award up to $50,000 for up to 2 years of project activities. Pre-proposals are not required.

The two-step funding process is a graduated path to submitting a competitive systems proposal, but a research team may enter at whatever level suits their project--the planning stage, preliminary fact finding stage or full-scale systems research.

Research and Education Long-Term Grants

Long-Term grants provide systems research teams with long-term support to build on infrastructure their previous research has put in place. Research teams work with the SARE Administrative Council to identify new research goals to be accomplished. These grants can support positions or

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Since 1997, Vivien Allen of Texas Tech University has used SARE grants for long-term research on the water conservation benefits of multi-cropping grazing beef and cotton. The project required many growing seasons over hundreds of acres in order to adequately show the benefits of the system.

Building on the SARE research, in 2005 Allen was awarded a $6.2 million grant from the Texas Water Development Board for an eight-year comparison of water use among an array of integrated and monoculture systems on 26 producer sites that include over 4,000 acres.

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activities in place prior to the grant application. Since they are designed to establish long-term capacity rather than gaining a near-term result to a specific research question, these grants can help build capacity at 1890 universities so that they can compete for larger systems projects. They provide $50,000-$100,000 per year for five or more years, reviewed annually.

SARE Matching Grants

SARE regions will be allowed to make matching grants for the creation or enhancement of state programs once SARE's national Research and Education appropriation exceeds $15 Million. SARE funding of up to $1 Million would have to be matched by non-SARE funds. Although the Matching Grant program is not yet in place, S-SARE offers planning grants in the range of $10,000 to $20,000 for one year to states who wish to prepare for the time when Congress allocates such funds.

Getting Started

Information about applying for all Southern SARE grants can be found at www.southernsare.org Specific details of each grant will be in the respective calls for proposals.

To find out how these changes fit into Southern SARE's overall funding strategy for the future see the document *Advancing Sustainable Agriculture* at www.southernsare.org.

Research and Education Grants Program Calendar

Research and Education Projects generally are conducted by multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional research teams addressing whole systems. Research and Education grants award up to $300,000 for up to 3 years of project activities.

2009

March Call for preproposals released
June Preproposals due
August Full proposals requested
Nov. Full proposals due

2010

February Administrative Council announces grant awards

Researchers not yet ready to submit a Research and Education systems proposal can apply to one of the entry-level grants : Research and Education Planning Grants or Research and Education Preliminary Grants. CFP for these grants will be released in summer.

Long-Term Research and Education Projects will be conducted by teams that already have a successful systems reseearch project in place. The first call for proposals will be released in 2010 with funding in 2011.

Thinking Categorically

Southern SARE's Research and Education Grants Program has introduced changes to help applicants focus on whole systems research. Applicants must propose research that fits one of three grant categories:

- **Production research**—Focused on actual production methods, this kind of research has made up the bulk of SARE's project portfolio in the past and has developed techniques that have become common tools for farmers.

SARE-funded research has helped techniques such as cover cropping, conservation tillage, management intensive grazing and integrated pest management move from alternative agriculture to mainstream.

- **Postharvest/food systems research**—These projects examine what happens past the farm gate such as in the markets, distribution systems and policy making. This category can serve as a funding path for social science researchers to make a difference in our farm and food systems.

SARE projects in this category have evaluated the potential market for local food in North Carolina, tested the quality of cheese made with frozen goat milk and compared tenderness of pasture-finished beef with conventional beef.

- **A combination of production and postharvest/food systems research**—The ultimate in systems research would connect what goes on in the ground with everything that happens after a crop is harvested, including adding value, marketing, infrastructure for processing and transportation, as well as policy making.

Few SARE projects have encompassed all of the elements from production through marketing and policymaking. In Kentucky a pastured poultry project conducted by Heifer International researched the policies for on-farm processing in every Southern state; trained farmers in every stage of pastured poultry production/processing/marketing; researched and built a mobile poultry processing plant and worked with Kentucky lawmakers to license it; and developed state approved training for producers who use it.