

Understanding the Tennessee SARE Model State Program

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The SARE program was first authorized in the 1985 federal farm bill with funding beginning in 1988 as the USDA Low-Input Sustainable Agriculture (*LISA*) program. The name was changed to Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) in the early 1990's to better reflect the principles of sustainable agriculture and to show the dual mission of research and education.

SARE is designed to help advance farming systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities. SARE is a part of USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and functions as a nationwide research and education grant program providing funding for various projects, outreach and education.

SARE currently has five grant programs:

1. Research and Education Grants
2. Professional Development Program Grants
3. On-Farm Research Grants
4. Producer Grants
5. Graduate Student Grants

The Professional Development Program (PDP) was begun in 1994 to provide sustainable agriculture education and outreach strategies for Extension employees, NRCS staff and other agricultural educators and leaders who work directly with farmers and farm families. PDP funds are used to support activities that educate agriculture professionals. Competitive PDP funds may be used to cover activities such as:

- Conducting educational and training workshops
- Creating educational manuals and videos
- Conducting on-farm tours and demonstrations

In addition to SARE's competitive PDP grants, SARE state coordinators may request PDP funds to conduct training programs. Tennessee's state training program is co-coordinated by TSU Extension and UT Extension and is classified as a model-state program.

The state co-coordinators work together with the state SARE program assistant to expand sustainable agriculture training for Extension, NRCS and other agricultural professionals who will help producers develop and implement more sustainable agriculture practices. The SARE PDP program is a "train-the-trainer" program where farmers are not the focus of the training but are the ultimate beneficiaries of the information that is taught. A new training program is developed each year and submitted for funding to Southern SARE (SSARE). The annual training

program should provide training and information on sustainable production practices and conservation.

Key characteristics of successful state SARE programs include:

- Development of training programs (including farm tours and field days)
- Delivery of training programs for new and current personnel
- Utilization of SARE grantees (including producer cooperators) in training
- Partnering with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)
- Collaboration with farmer organizations
- Promotion of all SARE grant programs
- Development of networks that assist in the distribution of SARE materials and information
- Assessment of needs
- Communication, reporting and evaluation of the SARE training program

The following are expectations of the state SARE program, state co-coordinators and program assistant:

- Attend SSARE annual meeting for state coordinators and program assistants
- Establish a state SARE advisory committee
- Conduct state SARE advisory committee meeting at least once per year
- Work with SARE advisory committee to develop strategies for sustainable agriculture outreach and education
- Submit an annual report and budget
- Raise the visibility of SARE in the state
- Lead efforts which bring sustainable agriculture training to every county agriculture agent
- Sponsor sustainable agriculture conferences/training in the state
- Submit a PDP competitive enhancement grant proposal
- Encourage appropriate organizations and agencies to submit SARE competitive grant program proposals
- Create new networks
- Seek broad participation in SARE funding program by limited resource and minority farmers

State PDP funding may be used to cover expenses such as:

- Statewide training sessions
- On-farm workshops
- Travel to out-of-state workshops
- Purchase of educational materials

