

2006 Annual State Report to the Southern Region SARE Program

South Carolina

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II. Abstract

2006 was the first full year of operation for the South Carolina SARE PDP Model State Program (MSP). The MSP Assistant Position has greatly facilitated statewide training program efforts in collaboration with SC State (1890) Extension, the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) and the state Department of Agriculture. We have increased the number and diversity of stakeholders who provide input into the planning process for statewide training. This has been done through a combination of statewide and regional stakeholder and advisory group planning meetings. We have expanded training opportunities for extension agents and other agriculture professionals by organizing educational/training events on specific topics related to stakeholder-identified training needs, and by providing travel scholarships to agriculture professionals for participation in additional local and regional training events. Highlights of 2006 included a 5-day, hands-on IOIA Organic Certification and Inspection Course, and a series of on-farm demonstrations, farm tours and workshops for limited resource and minority farmers on sustainable vegetable production and marketing practices. Specific training activities for 2007 will be finalized at the state planning meeting in February, and will likely focus on programs to assist beginning small-scale farmers and existing conventional farmers wishing to transition to sustainable/organic production.

III. Summary Report

1. Briefly describe how your training efforts have addressed objectives in your state's implementation plan for sustainable agriculture.

(a) Expand the existing strategic planning process for statewide sustainable agriculture development. A primary program focus of 2006 was to develop a process to obtain input on program planning from additional stakeholders representing greater diversity among the sustainable agriculture community. As a first step, an "Open Forum" public meeting was held in early February in Columbia, SC where participants discussed critical issues related to sustainable agriculture development in the state and possible solutions to address challenges. State Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Committee (AC) members attended the Open Forum meeting, and met the next morning to prioritize issues and to plan training/education activities for the year. Upon recommendation of the AC, an additional stakeholder planning meeting, a "Sustainable Agriculture Summit", was held in April in Columbia. Input from that meeting resulted in the organization of regional advisory groups (Lowcountry and Midlands-Upstate groups) in order to address issues on a local scale. The regional advisory groups have each met once during 2006 and plan to meet twice annually. Input from those meetings will be communicated by the regional chairs to the AC at the annual planning meeting in February 2007.

(b) Increase the number of Extension agents, NRCS, FSA and state Department of Agriculture staff and other sustainable agriculture educators who participate in the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA) Annual Conference. We provided travel scholarships for 8 extension agents and farmer-educators to attend the 2006 CFSA Conference in Spartanburg, SC and to participate in Conference workshops and farm tours. This not only provided an opportunity for participants to gain knowledge and competency in sustainable agriculture, but also facilitated interactions and established relationships between agriculture professionals and farmers. In addition, 23 limited resource farmers and farmer-educators from South Carolina attended the January Southern SSAWG Conference (made possible by a special grant from SR SARE).

(c) Continue to provide support for the CFSA Annual Conference. We provided \$500 to CFSA to support participation of Conference speakers who contributed expertise and information on topics relevant to the sustainable agriculture community in South Carolina.

(d) Establish a process to recognize SC cooperative extension personnel for excellence in sustainable agriculture outreach. We finalized criteria for a Sustainable Agriculture Service and Leadership award (one award per institution) to be presented at the annual state planning meeting. Although awards were not formally presented in 2006, extension agents who exemplified outstanding dedication to the promotion of sustainable agriculture received travel scholarships to a sustainable agriculture event of their choice.

(e) Organize and conduct in-service training opportunities for Extension agents, NRCS, FSA and state Department of Agriculture personnel, agricultural educators, and for other interested persons as space permits. Training events were held throughout 2006 according to priority needs identified at the January AC meeting (see training outcome summary under section 2 below).

(f) Enhance professional development opportunities for extension agents. Travel scholarships were provided for extension agents to attend the following events in 2006:

- Workshop: "Putting it all Together: Using Livestock". Perrysville, AR (4 agents)
- Mountain Organic Growers School, Flat Rock, NC (4 agents)
- National SARE Conference, Oconomowoc, WI (2 agents)
- Open Forum on Sustainable Agriculture, Columbia, SC (8 agents)

- Sustainable Agriculture Summit, Columbia, SC (6 agents)

2. Provide bullet statements of training outcomes

The following training/educational events were organized and conducted during 2006:

- *Pastured Poultry-Putting it All Together, January 14, Hardeeville, SC* (25 agents and farmers attending). Participants received hands-on training in small-scale poultry production and direct marketing, including internet marketing. Conducted by Bill Welch of Broken Wing Farm.
- *SSAWG Conference, Louisville, KY*. A group of 23 limited resource farmers and farmer-educators were organized from throughout the state and traveled by bus to attend the SSAWG Conference.
- *Open Forum on Sustainable Agriculture, February 5, Columbia, SC*. 75 stakeholders (including farmers, agriculture professionals and state agriculture officials) discussed issues related to sustainable agriculture development in South Carolina, and identified critical needs. The meeting enhanced communication and interaction among diverse groups, and identified areas of common interest.
- *State Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Committee Annual Planning Meeting, February 6, Columbia, SC*. Advisory Committee members discussed stakeholder input from the Open Forum meeting and prioritized issues to be addressed. Top priority was given to providing assistance to beginning local/organic farmers in order to meet the increasing demand for local/organic farm products.
- *Opportunities in Organic Production, February 28, Charleston, SC*. This training provided attendees (36 farmers and agriculture professionals) with critical information and lists of available resources on various topics related to starting an organic farm (from certification through marketing).
- *Upstate South Carolina Coop Exploratory Meeting, March 27, Greer, SC*. The 28 farmers, agriculture professionals and community leaders in attendance discussed opportunities and plans to develop a coop for marketing of local farm products from upstate South Carolina.
- *Sustainable Agriculture Summit, April 12, Columbia, SC*. 24 key stakeholders (from land grant, state government and farm organizations) met to review priorities identified at the Open Forum and Advisory Committee meetings, and to develop a list of priority issues for action. Break-out sessions of regional advisory groups identified several “top priority” issues to be addressed, including creating opportunities for organic grain production and for marketing of farm products through CSAs.
- *Leadership South Carolina Tour, April 28, Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm, Clemson, SC*. A group of 18 business and political leaders from South Carolina toured the farm and increased their awareness of potential opportunities for local/organic products, and the importance of small-scale, sustainable agriculture in South Carolina.
- *Establishing a Campus Market Garden: Tour of the Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm, July 20, Clemson, SC*. Officials from Furman University and Greenville/Spartanburg Extension gathered information on developing a campus market garden and CSA at Furman University in Spartanburg.
- *Exhibit; EarthFare Market Festival, July 29, Greenville, SC*. The SC Sustainable Agriculture Program was represented in an exhibit at the event, along with organic produce for sale from the Clemson student farm (over 800 people attended).
- *Lowcountry Sustainable Agriculture Advisory Group Meeting, Charleston, SC*. This first meeting was held to elect a chair and to set format/location for future meetings.

- *IOIA Organic Certification and Inspector Training, August 7-11, Clemson, SC.* 12 extension personnel were selected to participate in this intensive, 5-day training conducted by IOIA instructors. Outcome: a core group of extension professionals in South Carolina with comprehensive knowledge of the procedures involved with organic farm certification and inspection (all passed the final exam qualifying them as organic inspectors). These organic farming “expert agents” are available to help new farmers who want to begin an organic farming operation, and also existing farmers wishing to transition to organic production.
- *Tour of Happy Cow Dairy and Creamery, October 10, Pelzer, SC.* A group of 20 Clemson agriculture students and extension agents gained knowledge of sustainable cattle grazing practices, and of direct marketing of dairy products (conducted by Tom Trantham).
- *Compost Workshop/Demonstration, October 27, Calhoun Field Student Organic Farm, Clemson, SC.* 56 farmers, farmer-educators and extension agents gained knowledge of on-farm compost production and use. Participants toured research plots to evaluate compost as a soil amendment in vegetable production, and plots where application of compost tea was evaluated for control of foliar disease on tomato. Graduate students gave a summary of research results.
- *Direct Marketing Workshop, November 13 & 14, Raleigh, NC.* 9 South Carolina agents and farmer-educators gained information on direct marketing strategies for agricultural products.
- *Home, Garden and Landscape Pest Management Workshop, November 28, Greenwood, SC.* This course was provided for 25 landscape professionals to expand their familiarity with and use of sustainable (non-chemical) pest management practices.
- *Sustainable Vegetable Production for Limited Resource and Minority Farmers, July through November, Hampton, Allendale, Beaufort, Colleton and Jasper Counties, SC.* This comprehensive training project was organized by 1890 Extension to increase awareness and competency in sustainable vegetable production and marketing practices for 21 limited resource and minority farmer-educators who participated. Training activities included a series of on-farm demonstrations, farm tours, workshops, and production and marketing meetings on the following topics; Soil and Nutrient Management, Low-Input Production Practices for High Value Vegetables, Risk Management and Recordkeeping, and Post-harvest Handling and Marketing.

3. Briefly describe expectations for future sustainable agriculture training events: As indicated in our Model State Program Plan of Work, the state Advisory Committee will meet with stakeholders in Columbia, SC in early February to identify and prioritize training needs, and to schedule training events for 2007. Based on preliminary stakeholder input, it is likely that 2007 events will focus on beginning, limited resource/organic farmers, and on existing farmers wishing to transition to organic production. Specific topic areas likely to be included in 2007 training include new farm planning and infrastructure, quality considerations and guidelines for direct and wholesale marketing, organic grain production and marketing, and planning and organizing a CSA marketing operation.