

SAREP COMMENTS ON RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE SAREP REVIEW COMMITTEE FINAL REPORT

RECOMMENDATION	COMMENTS
<p><u>A. Program Structure</u> SAREP has name recognition among some parts of the sustainable agriculture and organic agriculture community. The following recommendations address how to expand this name recognition so that the program is truly statewide. It addresses how to increase the effectiveness of SAREP.</p>	<p>The work of the Review Committee occurred in parallel with preparation of ASI's initial strategic plan (http://www.asi.ucdavis.edu/board/meeting-2008/Strategic_Snapshot_at_December_2008.pdf), which, in turn, has informed the ongoing process of SAREP restructuring. We appreciate the Committee's careful attention to the integrity and identity of SAREP and we feel that the outcomes of ASI organizational design and SAREP restructuring are consistent with the objectives of maintaining a strong, effective, statewide SAREP program. The ASI and SAREP structural processes are nearly complete, but unfortunately were not finalized in time for full review by the Committee.</p>
<p>A1. ASI and SAREP need to have separate missions.</p>	<p>We agree and intend to continue to use SAREP's current mission statement, which is derived from its legislative mandate and which we believe is compatible with the overarching ASI mission statement.</p>
<p>A2. SAREP would benefit from its own strategic plan, including information on how they identify and address their priorities. The plan could be informed by current planning activities of ASI, but it must be unique from ASI.</p>	<p>If the Panel's meaning here is narrower than the conventional use of the term "strategic plan" and closer to the sense of a work plan -- essentially referring to the need for greater coordination and accountability regarding activities within SAREP -- then we are in agreement. Once the two new SAREP academic coordinators are recruited, it will be their responsibility to undertake a participatory process, engaging stakeholders and users, to develop a work plan for the medium term (say 4-5 years) that details priorities, highlights key partnerships, identifies desired outcomes and impacts, and, from these, articulates tangible outputs, clear activities and realistic resource requirements for each of the two thematic areas, Agriculture, Resources & the Environment, and Food & Society. Each of these thematic work plans will include research, education, communication, and engagement activities.</p>

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	<p>However, if by “Strategic Plan” the Review Committee is referring to the full range of higher-level elements of conventional strategic planning (e.g., vision, mission, values, principles, strategies), then we would respectfully disagree with this recommendation. Since ASI’s new strategic plan integrates the activities of all its affiliate units, including SAREP, we feel that a separate strategic plan for SAREP would undermine the potential complementarities that have been identified and can be achieved through coordinated efforts. ASI’s strategic plan recognizes the unique assets of each unit while looking for ways to work together and strengthen the whole. Moreover, many of the activities in ASI’s strategic plan are designed to work across all units. For example, the communications plan includes web redesign and knowledge management improvements, outreach efforts, and events that span all programs and units.</p>
<p>A3. SAREP should have its own statewide advisory committee or committees (including a technical advisory committee) to help set priorities and facilitate communication with their stakeholders.</p>	<p>With the creation of ASI, we agreed with ANR to create a unified external advisory committee for both ASI and SAREP on a trial basis. We held the inaugural meeting of this advisory board on December 9-10, 2008, and feel it prudent to give this approach more time before abandoning it for other options. Diverse perspectives are represented on the ASI External Advisory Board and the December meeting included discussion of SAREP and priorities for moving forward (including the grants program). We would suggest deferring a final judgment on this unified structure until the next external review of SAREP. We agree however that more needs to be done to improve engagement and communication with UCCE specialists and advisors. Two options being considered to better represent UCCE are: (1) adding another UCCE person to our current external advisory board; and/or (2) forming task- and subject-oriented committees (e.g. technical advisory committees) with UCCE members, AES faculty, and others around significant program areas. We also would note that a major responsibility of our two new SAREP academic coordinators will be statewide liaison with UCCE.</p>
<p>A4. SAREP advisory committee or committees must be a diverse group of people working in sustainable agriculture. For example, including growers, commodity board representatives, non governmental agency representatives and CE representatives.</p>	

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<p><u>B. Program Scope</u> SAREP has done some things very well for parts of the sustainable agriculture community but it has had limited geographical and stakeholder reach. The following recommendations address how to expand the scope to address more issues, expand geographically and help more stakeholders.</p>	<p>Although we believe that SAREP has demonstrated a statewide reach (geographically and regarding stakeholders), we also recognize that the scope of our activities has diminished somewhat in recent years due to budget constraints and transitions in leadership. Nonetheless, we are actively exploring new strategies to help us better communicate with stakeholders across California.</p>
<p>B1. ANR needs to address sustainable agriculture in the broadest sense.</p>	<p>While directed to ANR, we agree that this recommendation also applies to SAREP and have endeavored to reflect a broad perspective on sustainable agriculture through our ASI vision statement and operational principles, including two principles that explicitly address this issue:</p> <p>“We set our priorities and design our programs in response to concerns and aspirations of stakeholders representing the diversity of California.”</p> <p>“We serve the entire state, and all segments of agriculture and the food system.”</p>
<p>B2. SAREP needs to continue to address key topics in sustainability.</p>	<p>We agree and believe that SAREP has already undertaken work in a wide range of sustainability issues. In addition to input from our external advisory board and face-to-face sessions with various stakeholders (including focus groups), we recently concluded an online consultation in which more than 650 stakeholders participated. We believe the priorities identified in these exercises – ranging from water use efficiency, petroleum dependence and climate change to viability of small farms and local food systems -- represent emerging sustainability issues while building on SAREP’s strong track record.</p>
<p>B3. SAREP needs to align its priorities with major stakeholder groups. This is already happening with combined ASI/SAREP strategic planning process.</p>	<p>We agree and believe the new communications plan that we are developing in consultation with Fenton Communications will help guide these activities, including clearer prioritization and better targeting for key stakeholder groups.</p>

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B4. When funding is adequate, SAREP staff needs to be catalyzing partnerships rather than conducting its own research.	We view these activities as complementary and strive to maintain a balance between the two. The academic coordinator position descriptions and our communications plan seek to maintain this balance.
B5. SAREP needs to maintain its statewide focus.	We agree and once again would mention that the two new SAREP academic coordinator positions and our new communications plan will help SAREP to connect statewide.
B6. SAREP needs to expand its geographic range beyond the close proximity to UC Davis and northern California.	Although we agree that there are certainly underserved regions in the state, we do not feel that the phrase “close proximity to UC Davis” is an accurate reflection of our record or of the dossier of material provided to the Review Committee. In this respect, we wish to point out that much of our project work has extended well beyond our immediate region. For example, several Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS) projects, including our current Table Grape BIFS project, have demonstration sites in the San Joaquin Valley. Our organic initiatives also served several counties well beyond northern California (Monterey, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Diego). New BIFS projects focus on the Central Coast (harvestable hedgerow) and San Joaquin Valley (canning peaches). We realize, however, that replication of projects is not the only (or even the most cost-effective) strategy and we anticipate that our communications plan will help broaden and deepen SAREP’s statewide reach.
B7. SAREP must focus on cross disciplinary efforts necessary to solve problems facing agriculture, the food system and food distribution.	We agree that this is a unique niche for SAREP within ANR and feel that our commitment to a systems approach and cross-disciplinary work is evident in our operational principles, strategies, and activities.
B8. SAREP needs to find more opportunities to work with students; this is likely to be improved through the affiliation with ASI.	We agree and feel encouraged that recent activities through ASI are helping us connect with many more students on the Davis campus (e.g. the new undergraduate major, agroecology graduate group, and Students for Sustainable Agriculture); in time we hope to expand relationships with students on other campuses.
B9. SAREP role in ANR needs to be clearer, including how it fits in the ANR mission and priority for sustainable agriculture.	This recommendation seems directed at SAREP and ANR. We look forward to continuing opportunities for dialogue with ANR leadership to clarify and communicate SAREP’s roles.

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<p><u>C. Grant Program</u> The SAREP grant program was one of its major strengths. Grants were important to stakeholders when initiating sustainable agriculture programs. The following recommendations address how to make the most of the grants program.</p>	<p>We fully agree with the importance of the SAREP grant program and have already identified this as a priority. However, given the current budget constraints, we also believe that there other strategies and opportunities to broaden our reach (e.g., events like the recent Local Food Systems conference).</p>
<p>C1. SAREP needs to keep its grants program.</p>	<p>We agree. The SAREP grants program repeatedly and consistently has been indentified as a programmatic priority; most recently at the December meeting of the ASI External Advisory Board. Moreover, the fundraising case statement developed by UC Davis' Donor Development Office includes fundraising for the SAREP grants program as a priority activity.</p>
<p>C2. SAREP needs to fund systems-based research.</p>	<p>We agree and would add that systems-based research is a hallmark both of SAREP's past record and of our future strategies, as outlined in the ASI strategic plan.</p>
<p>C3. SAREP should use its grant making ability to stimulate needed statewide research and cross-disciplinary activities.</p>	<p>We know from experience that SAREP grants can play an important role in achieving broad scope and disciplinary integration, but we recognize that grants are one among several complementary means to achieve these ends.</p>
<p>C4. SAREP must provide follow up reports on information that was generated by grants. They need to post these reports to their web site.</p>	<p>A revamp of our Web site is part of the new communications plan. This will include a full evaluation of opportunities to improve knowledge management (e.g. project reports, summaries, archives, and databases). We agree that communicating to the public and our colleagues about results and impacts of SAREP's grants is both feasible and important and we also accept that more could be done to make this information available in a timely fashion. SAREP experience suggests that research summaries are useful for UCCE, campus personnel, the public and the media. For example, 1-2 page summaries have been prepared for each of SAREP's food systems projects funded in 2006 and 2007. These currently are being reviewed by project leaders and will be posted on SAREP's Web site when that review is complete.</p>

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<p><u>D. Communication and Collaboration</u> Fundamental to SAREP is outreach to the sustainable agriculture community. Some parts of the SAREP outreach have been very strong and successful, others less so. The following recommendations address how to expand and improve communications and collaboration.</p>	<p>We agree that outreach and communication with a diverse range of audiences is important to SAREP. We have taken a systematic approach to identifying and characterizing a broad range of stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the “sustainable agriculture community”. That stakeholder typology provided the elements of the framework for engaging with Fenton Communications to enhance our outreach and communications moving forward. (The final draft of that report is under review and we would be happy to share it with ANR colleagues.)</p>
<p>D1. SAREP needs to be able to express its unique role in ANR, which is its systems approach.</p>	<p>While a systems approach is one of SAREP’s features, we feel there may be other roles that are in fact more distinctive, including agenda-setting and synthesis of information for the multi-faceted fields of agricultural sustainability and food systems. We would appreciate the opportunity to consult with ANR leadership for advice on how we can identify and articulate SAREP’s distinctive roles and contributions for ANR, the University of California, and the State.</p>
<p>D2. SAREP needs to expand its partnering with researchers and stakeholders to extend limited resources.</p>	<p>We agree. The communications plan in development with Fenton will include recommendations on how we can expand (and track) our partnerships. We fully recognize the importance of networking; our work already places a strong emphasis on this. The two new SAREP academic coordinator positions also stress this role.</p>
<p>D3. SAREP needs to expand its audience when it communicates with internal and external groups.</p>	<p>We agree and part of our new communications plan emphasizes raising our profile with internal stakeholders (e.g. farm advisors, specialists, AES faculty) as a means of effectively reaching external groups (e.g. commodity groups).</p>
<p>D4. SAREP needs to refocus on bringing CE and AES together.</p>	<p>We agree, but think that the challenge actually is much bigger; we feel it also includes linking with farmers and ranchers, rural communities, NGOs and policymakers. We believe that the MOU between ANR and CA&ES, which creates the opportunity for an alliance between SAREP and UC Davis campus-based units under ASI can be one important part of a strategy for working across the full “continuum”.</p>
<p>D5. SAREP needs to be a more powerful knowledge source [improve web site as a high priority.] Needs to be the statewide dissemination focus for sustainable agriculture for ANR.</p>	<p>We <i>heartily</i> agree. As noted above, the new communications plan will help us address this; revitalization of the Web site is a top priority in that plan. In addition, our recent grant from the Packard Foundation (\$1,500,000) places a strong focus on communications, including funding for two post-graduate communication fellows to be affiliated with SAREP, and emphasizes a variety of communication media, including (but not limited to) Web-based information dissemination.</p>

