

# South Dakota Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SD SARE)

## Guidelines for Evaluating Travel Scholarships and Mini-grants

### Introduction

What is sustainable agriculture? SARE defines sustainability using three key concepts: **Profit** over the long-term; **Stewardship** of our nation's land, air, and water; and **Quality of Life** for farmers, ranchers, and their communities. This definition is similar to the concept of triple bottom-line economics: financial, environmental, and social. A business needs to be profitable, a good steward of its natural resources, and socially responsible. Moving toward sustainability should be seen as a continual process and not viewed dogmatically as "either you are or aren't".

The goal of SARE is to provide professional development opportunities for outreach personnel in state, federal, and non-governmental agencies. Travel scholarships are designed to provide opportunities for outreach personnel to gain new ideas, skills, and networking relationships that will enhance their work toward delivering sustainable agriculture programming. Usually individuals will apply for a travel scholarship to attend a professional conference, workshop, or meeting. Mini-grants are designed to provide opportunities to train the trainers. Mini-grants typically deliver training at conferences, workshops, or meetings to outreach personnel and can include end users, but that's not its main audience.

The grant application should be evaluated on the following categories:

1. The sustainable agriculture topic being covered by the conference, workshop, or meeting.
2. The outreach capability of the applicant requesting the training.
3. The degree of impact the grant will have on the applicant's own professional development (travel scholarship) or training of other trainers (mini-grants).

A successful grant application should meet all three categories. Below is more detail to help you evaluate whether or not the application meets the requirements.

### Sustainable Agriculture Topics

To help evaluate whether a travel scholarship or mini-grant meets SARE's professional development criteria, see the list of topics that help farmers/ranchers move toward higher levels of sustainability in Profit, Stewardship, and Quality of Life:

- Marketing – increase their financial sustainability
  - Processing on-farm
  - Creating value-added products
  - Brand identity
  - Conducting market research
  - Selling direct to consumers at farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) enterprises, roadside stands or through the web
  - Delivering to restaurants, small grocers and local institutions
- Community Vitality – local commerce
  - Hiring local help

- Selling local
- Market gardens
- High tunnels
- Ecological Insect and Weed Management
  - Integrated pest management
  - Cultural practices
  - Biological control
  - Judicious use of chemicals
- Grazing
  - Grazing systems aimed at providing ecological benefits rather than just focused on production
  - Multi-species grazing for increased carrying capacity and weed control
  - Targeted grazing for weed control
- Conservation tillage
  - Contour tillage, reduced tillage and no-till help prevent soil loss from wind and water erosion. In addition, they work toward improving water infiltration and soil health.
- Cover crops
  - Cover crops can enhance soil health, ecological function, and increase financial returns especially when grazed by livestock
- Crop, livestock and landscape diversity
  - Increasing crop diversity can provide cultural ways to reduce weed and insect pests and increase biological diversity.
  - Crop diversity can be a risk aversion strategy against extremes in market and weather variations
  - Integration of livestock on cropland can reduce feed costs and can help distribute nutrients.
  - Shelter belts and buffer strips can provide wind breaks, wildlife habitat, and protect areas prone to erosion.
- Nutrient management
  - Properly applied manure and leguminous cover crops can build soil fertility, protect water quality and reduce purchased fertilizer costs.
- On-farm energy conservation and production
  - Energy saving devices
  - Windmills
  - Solar power
  - Biodigesters

## **Personnel**

Does the applicant work as an outreach professional or work closely with people that do? People with a formal appointment as an extension educator, outreach director or staff of an NGO, and state or federal specialist qualify by the nature of their job description. Other people are less obvious. A producer that serves on a board of directors that participates in outreach with their organization would qualify because they have a formal role on their board even though that is not their specialty. A graduate

student pursuing training to become an outreach professional would qualify if the nature of the conference, workshop or meeting is specific to outreach training.

**Impact**

Is there a plan to make the information gained from attending a conference, workshop, or meeting available to the clientele? For example, a fact sheet or a news article could be written up regarding what was learned. Other ideas could be new outreach programming on information learned through a field day, workshop, or meeting.