

Sustainable Agriculture Summit – Focus on the Future **Summit Summary**

The Sustainable Agriculture Summit was held on June 12, 2008 at Fort Valley State University in cooperation with the University of Georgia and Southern SARE. The purpose of the Summit was to obtain stakeholder input on the critical needs for sustainable agriculture in Georgia. There were 190 participants. Based on the survey responses (48% returned), it was a diverse group with 34% farmers, 17% non-profit organizations, 16% researchers, 13% educators, 10% Extension, 3% agricultural professionals, and 9% others that included retailers, produce buyers, and an agricultural loan officer.

Small breakout groups identified 36 critical needs (see Table 1 below). After lunch, the large group clarified some of the topics that came out of the small groups. Time constraints prevented consolidation of topics or extensive rewording of topics that came out of the small groups. At the end of the day, participants were asked to vote for their top four priorities. The votes were tallied and weighted to obtain a weight rank (Table 1).

The four top-ranked priorities are summarized as:

1. Educating people about sustainable agriculture at a younger age,
2. Developing more local meat processing facilities,
3. Conducting place-based research,
4. Developing rural infrastructure such as canneries, seed processing, etc.

Several themes emerged from the small groups. Education is an important priority. The top ranked priority was education in sustainable agriculture for young people including FFA, 4H, and Young Farmers. This priority included more farming classes for the new generation and capitalizing on the desire of young people to connect with the land. Another high priority was better education on sustainable agriculture for Extension agents. This included the need for Extension agents to have better information on cultural practices, weed, disease, and insect control as well as marketing and profitability. A third education topic focused on the need to educate children, consumers, and producers about sustainable agriculture as a lifestyle. Some participants thought education of public school teachers and legislators was also important.

Another important theme was the need for infrastructure. Local processing facilities for meat and fish were the second highest ranked priority. Developing other local infrastructure such as canneries, seed processing, and organic products processing facilities was the fourth highest ranked priority. An interesting idea associated with this priority was the formation of farmer groups that would cooperatively own harvesting or production equipment.

A third important theme was the need for research-based information on sustainable agriculture. Place-based research on pest management, soil fertility, crop rotations, cultivars, as well as market trends was the third highest ranked priority. Pest management including weed and parasite control, and fertility management were identified as important topics for research in seven of the sixteen small groups. The need for research on plant varieties for organic and sustainable production systems were discussed in six of the sixteen small groups. Research topics that were identified in at least three different small groups were foraging systems, market trends and access, organic grain production, crop rotations, animal production systems, designs for small farm systems, and integration of livestock,

forestry and crop systems. Other topics included post-harvest handling, food safety, climate change effects, cost-effective crops, organic aquaculture feeds, cover crops, and vegetable production. Funding for positions to conduct organic or sustainable agriculture research was another highly ranked priority by the large group.

Many of the small groups also identified the need for better information on the research topics listed above on the web or in Extension publications. The small groups identified the need for better information for beginning farmers, farmers wanting to transition to sustainable agriculture, and for older farmers wanting to pass farms on to a younger generation.

Several priorities spoke to the need for coordination of sustainable agriculture programs throughout the state. These included developing a strategic plan, a Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and a working group that included the universities, Southern SARE, Georgia Dept. of Agriculture, and non-governmental organizations. During the large group discussion, several participants indicated that such a group should look beyond traditional agriculture stakeholders to health professionals and other non-traditional partners. The small groups identified a number of networking opportunities they would like to see developed including information networking, equipment sharing, and community farms.

Also several priorities indicated the need for farm-friendly regulations. These included farm-friendly regulations and policies for value-added products, flexibility in rules and regulations, and developing regulations with input from researchers, educators, farmers, and extension.

Finally, a number of priorities addressed marketing needs. The place-based research priority and extension education both specifically mentioned marketing. Other priorities included developing marketing networks for farmers and buyers, developing integrated business and community models such as institutional buyers paired with small farms, more help with marketing local and organic products, and developing a State Commission for Sustainable Agriculture (a producer group run like a commodity commission). The need for more information on local markets was strongly emphasized in the small groups where the topic came up in 15 of the 16 small groups.

The Summit was well-attended and many useful ideas were discussed. The priorities identified will be shared with decision-makers at both Fort Valley State University College of Agriculture and the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences so that ways to help address these priorities can be developed. Scientists and Extension personnel will be able to use this information to pursue grant funding to help address the priorities identified. We expect many of the non-governmental organizations and government organizations interested in sustainable agriculture may also be able to use this information to help prioritize some of their work.

Table 1. Critical needs for sustainable agriculture in Georgia as identified by stakeholders at the Sustainable Agriculture Summit, June 12, 2008.

Topic	Number of votes				Total No. Votes	Weighted Rank
	1	2	3	4		
<i>Number 1 Priority</i> - Educate in sustainable agriculture at a younger age. Education of young people - FFA, 4H, Young Farmer. Offer more farming classes for the new generation. There is a lack of public knowledge of young people on agriculture and efforts should target hands-on applications and growing fruits & vegetables. Capitalize on desire of youth to connect with land, outreach education. Expand farm to school	5	9	11	4	29	73
<i>Number 2 Priority</i> - Processing facilities for small livestock and pastured poultry/local meat processing facilities/nearby processing facilities for meat, fish, etc./local meat processing	8.5	5	0	6	20	55
<i>Number 3 Priority</i> - Place-based research on weed control, pest management, soil testing, fertility management, fire ant control, market trends & access, crop rotations, cultivars.	7	4	4	5	20	53
<i>Number 4 Priority</i> - Develop other local rural infrastructure - canneries, grain processing, seed processing, cooperatively harvesting and production equipment/ develop processing system for organic products	4.5	5	2	6	18	43
Strategic plan for Sustainable Ag in GA	7	2	2	2	13	40
Initiate farm transition program (older generation to younger generation). The program would assist farmers with transitioning ownership from older farmers to younger farmers. This would be done via hands-on experience and mentorship.	4	5	3	2	14	39
Funding for positions for organic/sustainable agriculture. (i.e. : state specialists to work in regions for organic sustainable ag)	4	4	3	1	12	35

Topic	No. of Votes				Total No. Votes	Weighted Rank
	1	2	3	4		
Lack education for extension agents, i.e. cultural practices, weed, disease, insect control, etc.. Educate the educators, i.e. extension - marketing , profitability, production	4	3	3	2	12	33
Center for Sustainable Agriculture (house staff, research, trainers, structure, organization to support funding, facilitate communication/support systematically, statewide)	2.5	3	5.5	2	13	32
Educate on economic benefits of sustainable agriculture. Marketing/communication, partnerships with local governments, etc./ Education of sustainable agriculture as a life style to children, consumers, and producers.	3	0	8	1	12	29
Working group for Georgia Coordination (include University, extension, SARE, GO, GDA, NGOs, researchers and teachers)	2.5	4	2.5	3	12	30
Farm-friendly policies and regulations for value-added products such as buttermilk, eggs/better working relationships with regulatory agencies - flexibility in rules and regs.	2	4	3	0	9	26
Marketing and networking for new and existing farmers and buyers	1	3	6	1	11	26
Demonstrating whole farm systems that reflect many situations. May be used for teaching and training and may involve community farms	2	2	3	4	11	24
Educate all public school teachers in university curriculum in sustainability and ecology. Also, assist in making the connections between the statewide curriculum in Ecology, Science, and Geography with resources in the state. (making both teachers and students more knowledgeable and make producers and landowners aware of educational opportunities)	1	4	0	5.5	11	22

Topic	No. of Votes				Total No. Votes	Weighted Rank
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Do research to show that sustainable agriculture works through on farm research and demonstrations	2	2	2	1	7	19
Integrated Business/Community Model - Business Model (innovated), small farm with institutional buyer Ex: Emory University committed to 75% sustainable or local grown by 2015	1	2	3	2	8	18
More help to market local and organic products. Marketing assistance for local growers	1	3	2	0	6	17
Research, education and extension on post-harvest handling of produce	3	0	1	2	6	16
Website that identifies challenges for sustainable ag farming in GA, resources to address those challenges, resources specifically for new farmers	1	2	1	2	6	14
Developing regulations with educators, researchers, extension to make sustainable movement viable (including specialists from other states)	1	3	0	0	4	13
State Commission for Sustainable Agriculture (producer run like commodity group - Peanut Commission)	2	1	0	2	5	13
Distinction (definition) between organic, sustainable agriculture, locally grown, and conservation tillage	1	1	1	3	6	12
Incentive to buy local & property tax relief	0	2	2	2	6	12
Educate our legislators on the importance of sustaining agriculture (via handouts and input from local/state/national communities)	1	1	1	2.5	6	12
Program to support transitioning to sustainable agriculture - grants, workshops, and policy changes and program to support beginner farmers	1	0	2	3	6	11
A mechanism to establish goals (clear and definable) because of diverse interests of sustainable ag community	1.5	2	0	0	4	12

Topic	No. of Votes				Total No. Votes	Weighted Rank
	1	2	3	4		
Resistant plants - breeding, seed source and transplant for southern varieties	0	1	2	2	5	9
Mechanism by which farmers can identify research needs	1.5	1	0	1	4	10
Partner government agencies, non-profits and universities for information sharing	0	1	0	2	3	5
Funds for small markets such as farmer's market for marketing and to be open longer	1	0	0	1	2	5
Utilize CBOs [community based organizations] to educate on the importance of value-added products and recycling waste products into organic fertilizer (urban and rural) \$\$	1	0	0	0	1	4
Advocate urban research, education, extension	0	0	1	1	2	3
More research for cost-effective (profitability) crops	0	0	1	0	1	2
With the news of contaminated fruits and vegetables, there should be a priority to address and educate the public on biosecurity as part of sustainable agriculture	0	0	1	0	1	2
Limit access to knowledgeable labor through training or through mentoring	0	0	0	0	0	0