

In 2003 Southern Region SARE added a new priority area primarily for social science research addressing **policy, program evaluation and quality of life**. While *policy* and *program evaluation* are terms generally interpreted the same in all disciplines, the term *quality of life* can be elusive.

Two SARE objectives defined in the 1995 Farm Bill touch on the ways sustainable agriculture can address quality of life issues:

- Enhance the quality of life for farmers/ranchers and society as a whole, in part by increasing income and employment - especially profitable self-employment opportunities in agriculture and rural communities. Specifically, a major goal is to strengthen the family farm system of agriculture, a system characterized by small- and moderate-sized farms that are principally owner operated;
- Strengthen rural communities by creating economic conditions, including value-added products that foster locally owned business and employment opportunities.

Quality of life research can focus on individual families or an entire rural community or a combination of both. On an individual level farmers often name reasons for farming that are not related to profit making. These reasons are referred to as quality of life benefits of farming. They include: living in open space, personal freedom, privacy, recreational opportunities, quality learning experiences for children, a nurturing atmosphere, opportunities for children to build self esteem, wholesome food for farm family, a meaning and purpose to life that comes with caring for one's land, recognition/relationships within the community. Any research that aims to enhance such lifestyle characteristics would contribute to quality of life.

On a community level research could address structural changes in agriculture; issues regarding human and social capital: educational techniques for growers, consumers and ag agents; agriculturally-linked rural economic development; long-term farmer/consumer relationships; the dynamics of cooperatives; policy change that would reward the transition to sustainable ag; nuisance issues; farm/nonfarm relationships including urban sprawl conflicts; meeting the needs of niche populations (ethnic, youth, senior, poor or other) as consumers or growers.

Following are highlights from SSARE projects that show how some investigators have used social science research to advance sustainable agriculture.

Southern SARE administers seven different grant programs with staggered calls for proposals and submission dates.

To view the calls and yearly schedule of submission dates see [www.southernsare.org](http://www.southernsare.org) or contact Southern SARE at:

Phone: (770) 412-4787  
[info@southernsare.org](mailto:info@southernsare.org)



Understanding the constraints within the structure of the conventional poultry industry enables agents and educators to better support poultry producers who would like to transition to more sustainable systems. Project LS97-085.

### ***Impacts on Agricultural Sustainability from Structural Change in Four Commodity Production Systems, Hal Hamilton, Center for Sustainable Systems, Vermont.***

This project documented how changes in the structure peanut, poultry, swine and tobacco production systems have effected the lives of farm families working in those systems. These four commodity systems were chosen because together they employ much of the Southern farm population and also because they represent different points on a continuum that ranges from greatest independence for the farmer (tobacco) to the most corporatized, vertically integrated (poultry). According to the project summary "farmers will adopt sustainable agriculture practices to the extent to which the commodity systems networks in which they are embedded enable them to see sustainable agriculture as a practical way to respond..." Therefore, promoters of sustainable agriculture need to understand how the structure of the commodity systems enables or constrains producers who would like to consider adopting more sustainable methods.

Comparative case studies were conducted in communities in Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina and Kentucky where one or more of the commodity systems were prevalent. Using interviews, focus groups and observations the case studies examined the social consequences of such changes as power relationships between producers and non-producers in the systems; technology-adoption freedom versus risk aversion; and loss of innovative decision making.

In each of the communities, producers and other stakeholders (bankers, civic leaders, farm supply dealers, extension agents, etc.) participated in the research and outreach phases of the project.

Results of the case studies were analyzed for common patterns, themes and trends in the changing systems. Then recommendations were made for supporting farmers who are interested in moving toward sustainable agriculture within each of the commodity systems. The project introduced many questions that a social scientist could address in looking at agriculture as a system that links farmers to larger ecological, social and political systems.

The 19-page project summary can be found at [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org). Click on National Data Base of Projects and search for project number LS97-085. For a hard copy of the 192-page final report contact the SSARE office at (770) 412-4787 or [sare@griffin.uga.edu](mailto:sare@griffin.uga.edu)

***Increasing Growers' Quality of Life Through Direct Marketing: The role of farmers markets and consumer supported agriculture*** Susan Andreatta, University of North Carolina at Greensboro Dept. of Anthropology

This research project examined the potential for direct marketing, particularly by producers farming near urban centers. The main project goal was to identify ways farmers in North Carolina could improve their quality of life by increasing the community's support for local agricultural products. Specifically, data were collected on farmers' current production and marketing strategies at a large farmers market and through subscription arrangements. Data were also collected on consumers' purchasing priorities. These data were used to develop outreach programs designed both to modify farmers' strategies and to educate consumers about local agricultural production. Presentations about the findings were made to farmers and consumers.

The Piedmont Triad Farmers Market, an established state-operated market that attracts 10,000 customers on any summer Saturday, provided producers and consumers for the farmers' market research. CSA farmers and their shareholders were identified throughout the state and interviewed by telephone about the positive and negative aspects of subscription marketing. Researchers also conducted community samples in 11 counties. They interviewed people at health clubs, universities, libraries and other public places about their produce shopping habits.

The data from all five research populations were analyzed for producers' and consumers' expectations of the marketing experience. The results were presented through educational programs for producers, market managers, extension agents and consumers. The educational programs served different purposes for different audiences. They informed producers about what consumers are seeking when they expend the effort to buy directly from a farmer rather than just going to a supermarket. They assisted farmers in meetconsumers and communities about how they can support a local agro-food system.

The 30-page project summary can be found at [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org). Click on national data base of projects and search for project number *LS00-109*. Hard copies of the full report, complete with articles published in *Human Organization* and *Culture and Agriculture* can be obtained from [sare@griffin.uga.edu](mailto:sare@griffin.uga.edu) or (770) 412-4787.

***Building from Excellent Agents to Effective Organizers, Jim Worstell, Delta Land and Community, Arkansas***

The project objective was to stimulate training programs to help county agents become better facilitators. Profiles were collected from 52 ag agents who have been successful in helping producers organize collaborative, sustainable rural enterprises. A book containing 17 of the profiles was published and became part of training programs in Michigan and Missouri. The successful agents also identified six areas of social psychology in which ag agents need to develop social psychological skills. Their pooled information became the core of a conference in 2001 which attracted participants from six southern states and launched a formal network of people interested in learning more about effective facilitation and the organization of new enterprises.

Read the SARE project report at [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org). Click on National Data Base of Projects and search for project number LS01-130. The SARE project was only part of this ongoing research and education effort. For details about the entire project visit the website

[www.deltanetwork.org](http://www.deltanetwork.org)



***Saving the Southern Legacy: Heirloom plants and local knowledge for profitable, sustainable agriculture*** Bob Rhoades, University of Georgia Dept. of Anthropology

More than just a seed-saving effort, this project used memory banking research to document that heirloom plants serve as artifacts of larger cultural expression such as cuisine, folklore, community values, social customs and that they serve as connections to ancestry, identity, and what it means to be Southern in a globalizing world.

The multigenerational activities created a network of Southerners interested in preserving not only heirloom seeds but the production information and cultural importance as well. To facilitate the activities the project leaders developed a seed bank, a directory of southern seed savers (in print and online), a tool kit for memory banking and an annual seed swapping event.

The project resulted in one dissertation in anthropology and the PRAXIS award to Dr. Nazarea by the Washington Area Practicing Anthropologists association.

For more information go to

<http://www.uga.edu/~ebl/SouthernMemory1/>

Read the final project report at [www.sare.org](http://www.sare.org). Click on National Data Base of projects and type project number LS96-078 in the search line.

Resources for further reading about the connection between sustainable agriculture and quality of life:

**Berry, Wendell.** 1990. *What are People For*. North Point Press, San Francisco, CA.

**Berton, Valerie.** 2001. *The New American Farmer*. SARE, USDA, Washington DC. free at <http://www.sare.org/newfarmer>

**Flora, C.B.** (editor). 2001. *Interactions Between Agroecosystems and Rural Communities*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press.

**Flora, C.B. and J.L. Flora with S. Fey.** 2004. *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*. (2nd Edition) Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

**Hendrickson, Mary** (web site coordinator). *Food Circles Networking Project: Connecting Farmers, Consumers and Communities*. <http://foodcircles.missouri.edu>

**Horne, Jim.** *The Next Green Revolution*. <http://www.kerrcenter.com/kerrweb/HTML/green.html>

**Ikerd, John.** *Papers*. <http://www.ssu.missouri.edu/Faculty/JIkerd>

**Kneen, Brewster.** *From Land to Mouth: Understanding the Food System*. Out of print but free download at <http://www.ramshorn.bc.ca>

**Pretty, Jules.** *Agri-Culture: Reconnecting, People Land and Nature*. 2002. <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/ces/CES/JPpage.htm>