



SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH
AND EDUCATION PROGRAM
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ONE SHIELDS AVENUE
DAVIS, CA 95616

February 2, 2009

Daniel H. Putnam
Program Leader-Agricultural Productivity
Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of California
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616-8780

Dear Dan,

On behalf of our team, I am pleased to send to you the response of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) to its recent ANR Statewide Program Five-Year Review. The dedicated work of the Chair, the Review Committee, and ANR staff throughout this process is very much appreciated and the final report is both thought-provoking and timely.

We are of course gratified by the Review Committee's finding that the SAREP program addresses a critical need for information and research on sustainable agriculture and that "these issues remain critical for the health of California agriculture and Californians in general." This review and its recommendations come at a time when SAREP is undergoing significant restructuring. SAREP is changing, and will continue to change, in ways intended to meet the shifting needs of our collaborators within the University of California and stakeholders across our State. As part of a larger strategic process through the Agricultural Sustainability Institute (ASI), we are developing a fundraising plan with strong support from the CA&ES Dean's office at UC Davis and are working with an external consultant, Fenton Communications, on the preparation of a new communications plan. Both of these initiatives cut across all ASI programs and units, with central roles for SAREP, and will help clarify our priorities, integrate our activities, and implement many of the recommendations in the final report. Moreover, the anticipated appointment of two new SAREP academic coordinators (replacing three previous positions) will provide scientific leadership for two of our thematic areas, "Agriculture, Resources and the Environment" and "Food and Society."

As you know, the Review Committee offered 22 recommendations focusing on program structure, program scope, the grants program, and communication and collaboration. I convened a SAREP staff meeting to discuss the findings of the Review Committee's final report

and to collect ideas and suggestions for this combined response. Overall we agree with the bulk of the recommendations from the Review Committee. Specifically, of the Review Committee's 22 recommendations, we fully agree with 16, we have qualified agreement or wish to seek clarification regarding five others, and we disagree with only one of their recommendations. The attached table itemizes the 22 committee recommendations, with our corresponding comments. I have summarized below what I feel are the most salient points for each of the four sets of recommendations.

Program structure. The Review Committee finalized its report just before the inaugural ASI strategic plan was completed in December 2008 and with SAREP restructuring still in progress, so it is not altogether surprising that our main areas of qualification and the single area of disagreement with the Committee's recommendations concern program structure.

We fully agree with the recommendation that ASI and SAREP have separate mission statements (A1), but we would appreciate some clarification of the recommendation that SAREP have its own strategic plan, distinct from ASI (A2). If the intent of recommendation A2 is to improve focus, clarity of purpose and accountability for outputs at the level of activities and resource allocation within SAREP, then we believe that can be accomplished through annual work plans that would be developed for each of the two thematic areas by the new SAREP academic coordinators (as detailed in the attachments). On the other hand, we do not agree that a distinct strategic plan for SAREP is a good use of staff time. Indeed, we feel it would undermine the synergies and efficiencies ASI is intended to produce through integration of activities in sustainable agriculture and, hence, would be counterproductive.

For similar reasons, we disagree with the recommendation that SAREP should have its own statewide advisory committee (A3), distinct from ASI. Early in 2008, I agreed with ANR leadership and the CA&ES Dean, on a provisional basis subject to review, to create a unified External Advisory Board for both ASI and SAREP. That Board had its inaugural meeting in December 2008 (apparently after the Review Committee had its final meeting), which by all accounts was highly successful, and we feel it is premature to abandon this model. Having said that, we recognize representation of UCCE perspectives in SAREP program planning and implementation requires more attention, but we feel this can be addressed by some combination of an additional appointment to the existing Board, creation of steering groups and technical committees for specific initiatives and projects, and implementation of our new communication strategy, which places great emphasis on UCCE.

Program scope. Generally on this topic, and specifically on recommendation B6, we believe that the Committee did not have a full appreciation for the breadth of SAREP's reach. In this respect, and also concerning the balance between partnerships and research (B4), we have provided clarifications of our views and further points for discussion in the attachment.

SAREP's grants program. We are in full agreement that this is a top priority for SAREP. The ongoing SAREP restructuring, the fundraising campaign with the CA&ES Dean's office and hiring of the ASI Proposal Coordinator/Senior Writer are three key ingredients in efforts to recreate and sustain a significant, broad-based, reliable, and path-breaking grants program at SAREP.

Communication and collaboration. We agree fully with the Review Committee's recommendations on these functions, which we see as key ingredients for enhancing SAREP's statewide reach and for broadening engagement across the continuum, despite limitations in funding and staff. We generally agree with the Committee's assessments of opportunities and challenges under this rubric, save two qualifications. First, while we agree that SAREP needs to communicate better about its unique role within ANR (D1), we are not sure that a "systems approach" truly is a unique feature of SAREP, although it certainly is a hallmark of our work. Moreover, we believe that there are other distinctive features that SAREP brings to ANR and would appreciate the opportunity to work with ANR leadership and other colleagues to identify SAREP's "unique selling points" within the new ANR strategic plan.

Second, and related to the first qualification, while we agree that bringing AES and UCCE together (D4) is an important task, we see the challenge for SAREP as larger than the divide between AES and UCCE and we also see this challenge as larger than SAREP itself. In other words, addressing the needs of a diverse clientele and grappling with complex collaborative arrangements is a challenge shared by all land grant institutions in the 21st Century. At SAREP, we hope that we can continue to contribute workable models to address these issues, but we also recognize that we need to address them in close partnership with ANR leadership and in innovative, reciprocal relationships with UCCE.

As we embrace these recommendations and move forward, we welcome further discussions with ANR leadership, UCCE colleagues, and others interested in SAREP's development and its potential for service to California.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas P. Tomich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Thomas P. Tomich
Director, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program