

Idaho SARE: Cultivating change through sustainable agriculture

AT A GLANCE

Idaho SARE strengthens sustainable agriculture across the state by supporting agriculture producers through local partnerships to advance innovative farming practices.

The Situation

Producers need additional support and resources to implement sustainable agriculture practices. Because sustainable agriculture encompasses diverse production systems, the needs and challenges of farmers, ranchers, educators and agricultural professionals vary widely across Idaho. Since 2020, the Idaho Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program has operated as a cost-reimbursement mini-grant program supporting statewide sustainable agriculture projects, providing local individuals and organizations with opportunities to develop and demonstrate practices that are economically viable, socially supportive and ecologically sound. Without this support, fewer sustainable practices would be tested, and producers may be less likely to adopt new approaches because of uncertainty about their effectiveness. The program provides educational opportunity by allowing producers and agricultural professionals to research and demonstrate locally relevant practices and share what they learn with others. The projects supported through Idaho SARE benefit individuals by increasing knowledge and skills related to sustainable agriculture practices.



Collaborative rangeland research tour. U.S. Sheep Experiment Station in Dubious. Photo by Jessica Windh.

Our Response

To address the need for enhanced sustainable agriculture in Idaho, we applied for funding and distributed Idaho SARE mini grants to producers and educators who proposed projects focused on researching and demonstrating sustainable agriculture practices. These projects partnered with a variety of local and statewide organizations, allowing participants to address regionally relevant agricultural challenges while sharing knowledge and results with other producers and communities. Examples of funded projects include:

- High tunnel construction and production in three different districts across Idaho

- Cover crop testing for grazing and corn silage systems
- Biostimulant research
- Regional food summits
- Forage testing
- Ranch succession planning
- Rangeland research tours

By supporting locally driven projects and partnerships, the Idaho SARE program has provided producers and educators with opportunities to test innovative practices and share practical information that can support more economically viable, socially supportive and ecologically sound agricultural systems throughout Idaho.

Program Outcomes

Since 2021, Idaho SARE has engaged 964 farmers/ranchers and 330 agriculture service providers across Idaho. Over the past five years, the Idaho SARE program has created numerous opportunities for producers, educators and agricultural professionals to learn and implement sustainable agriculture practices across the state. Through a combination of direct education, on-farm learning and financial support, the program has provided:

- 55 consultations
- 20 on-farm demonstrations
- 12 farm and research tours
- 46 individual webinars, talks and presentations
- 28 mini-grants
- 26 travel grants

Together, these efforts have expanded access to sustainable agriculture information, provided opportunities to evaluate practices in real-world settings, supported producer-led research and education, and

strengthened connections among agricultural professionals and organizations throughout the state. The mini-grants and travel grants have further enabled participants to explore new ideas and bring sustainable agriculture practices back to their farms, communities and professional networks.

Survey data collected from Idaho SARE events over the past five years indicate that the program has increased knowledge, skills and awareness of sustainable agriculture practices among agricultural service providers. A total of 330 agricultural service providers reported gaining knowledge, skills or awareness related to Idaho SARE and sustainable agriculture through their participation in program activities. Of those participants, 133 indicated that they intended to apply or use the knowledge they gained. In addition to individual learning, the outcomes of Idaho SARE-funded projects have strengthened connections across Idaho agriculture, resulting in 60 new working collaborations among producers, educators, organizations and other agricultural professionals. These outcomes demonstrate that Idaho SARE is not only increasing knowledge and skills but also building partnerships that can support continued adoption of sustainable agriculture practices throughout the state.

The Future

Idaho SARE will continue to support producers, educators and agricultural professionals in developing and implementing sustainable agriculture practices. The program will build on past successes by providing funding, education, demonstrations and opportunities for collaboration that address the diverse needs of Idaho agriculture. Continued investment will strengthen partnerships, support locally driven research and innovation, and encourage the adoption of economically viable, socially supportive and ecologically sound practices. By expanding knowledge and connections, we can help build a more resilient and sustainable future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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21-26-cwillmore-sustainable-agriculture • 8/26