

## Evaluation Summary

# Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture: A Participatory National Conference on Post- Secondary Education January 24-25, 2006 Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove, California

## Evaluation Summary

*In an attempt to improve future events, we would appreciate your feedback on the organization of the conference. Responses from this form will be summarized and distributed to all the meeting participants. Please return the completed form to the Facilitating Sustainable Agriculture registration desk (Chapel Hall) or send to Albie Miles (afmiles@ucsc.edu) by the end of the conference on Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>.*

Indicates average score based on 36 (26.5%) respondents of 136 participants.

Please circle the number that best represents your thoughts: Not at all \_\_\_\_\_ Very Much

Were your positive expectations for this event met?		1	2	3	4.25	5
Were you satisfied with the Open Space and World Café formats?		1	2	3	4.45	5
Did the event help you to clarify and/or meet your needs and interests?		1	2	3	4.24	5
Do you expect to use what you have gained in this event in your work?		1	2	3	4.31	5
Was the interaction with other participants valuable to you?		1	2	3	4.69	5
Did you find the poster session and resources exchange useful?	NA	1	2	3	4.46	5
Did you find the program presentations useful?	NA	1	2	3.80	4	5

Comments on program presentations:

- [Editor's note: Many respondents stated that the program presentations were held too late in the evening.]
- The presentation style was difficult after the Open Space techniques, and it took so long...it was interesting to hear about other programs, and put US Sustainable Ag. education into perspective nationally.

Written responses to the questions below.

1. Did you find the conference to be well organized? How might the organization be improved? Please comment.

Comments on question #1:

- [Editor's note: The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that the conference was well organized and facilitated and offered the following comments with regards to improvements that might be made in future conferences]:
- Important to have a designated facilitator and note taker for each breakout group.
- Signage for those who show up late to World Cafés; I heard there was some frustration with café groups morphing. [Several respondents indicated a need for improved signage or maps/list of the breakout sessions titles and locations.]
- Having more written feedback.
- Back to back dialog sessions all day was exhausting [need greater break/non-structured time].
- Program presentations were organized too late in the evening.
- It some time felt that we were moving from discussions too soon.
- The issues framed for the second day could have been more clearly defined
- I like the dialog but would have preferred more focus.

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- Allow more time for in-depth discussions. Consider some Open Space Tech. Mixed with several quality presentations or workshops on focused topics.
- The second day felt rushed. The group sessions were too short for the depth of conversations we were having. Need 45-60 min. blocks of time.
- More structured discussions. Identify key issues and stick to them. Limit group size to 6.
- Less time should be dedicated to explaining OST (use handout and or posters). Less checking back in with larger group.
- I would prefer it is earlier in January, if possible, although I know it is designed to coincide with EcoFarm. Many colleagues were not able to attend due to it being the first week of classes at our institution.
- Allow more time for the poster session and resources exchange and have it in a room with more space. It was too cramped and loud to have meaningful discussions with people about the poster, while others were picking up materials. And there wasn't enough time, especially since we were supposed to move around the room and view others' posters when they weren't there because they were also moving around the room viewing other posters. This did not work out well with such a short amount of time. Perhaps half of the people could have been asked to stay at their posters and tables while the half were scheduled to view them and then the order/groups could switch stations.
- For the open space sessions, present the slide about "how to dialogue" before starting the open spaces café. Most people did this well, but some were negative and dominated with their opinions, rather than listening and being opening to hearing the thoughts and experiences described by others. The slide that Grier Lielein presented on after the morning of 2<sup>nd</sup> day was too late to facilitate improved discussions.
- The Decision Café felt very rushed. The group I was in couldn't keep up with the instruction; the tables around us appeared to have similar problems and couldn't keep up with the tasks assigned. My observation is that it takes more time for a group to reach a consensus or of some kind and make a discussion than just share information as we did on the first day. However, it was helpful that we were in small groups for the decision café.
- Conferences are always about cramming a lot into a small period of time. I loved the world café and open space format, but the intensity of human interactions actually made it more tiring than your usual "transmission" style conference. So the only thing I felt was missing was a little scheduled down time.
- Signage for those who show up late to World Cafés; I heard there was some frustration with café groups morphing.
- Very well organized. I would prefer it is earlier in January, if possible, although I know it is designed to coincide with EcoFarm. Many colleagues were not able to attend due to it being the first week of classes at our institution.
- I would have broken things up a bit. I liked World Café and Open Space Tech. but not all day. Mon. was extremely long with too much talking in certain formats. Intersperse the program presentations throughout day one and day two. We also needed unstructured time for "just talking." More breaks, down time.
- No 2<sup>nd</sup> World Café on 1<sup>st</sup> day.
- More presentations from US SA programs throughout the 2 days.
- Room names should have been better posted.
- Yes – it was well organized. There was clearly a lot of thought put into the flow of the conference (moving from broad ideas on Tues. to focused thought and action plans on Wed.) and into helping us meet so many people.

### *2. Did the conference serve to address your needs and interests? How might this be improved?*

- My expectations for the conference, (naïve or not?), were that there would be some direct intentions on what the next steps are for educational/academic pathways to take in order to construct the sustainable food system/world we are musing about. My interests were sparked for sure, but the bar needs to be raised in our national discussion of sustainable agriculture in education, and education's role in sustainable agriculture – I say this because I think we are that capable, and likely a diverse mix of knowledge on the subject of Sustainable Agriculture Education. I think this knowledge could crossbreed. This might be improved by pre-conference reading assignments to promote discussion.
- I was really hoping to network, and since this conference was organized around the goal of having meaningful interactions with the other attendees, it really did meet this need.
- Yes it did. The dialogues were very positive, open, friendly, and constructive. The facilitators did a very good job explaining what was expected and were very cheery motivators.
- Yes, I learned from the other attendees and from the group break-out discussion summaries. I look forward to reading the session summaries. The curriculum sharing & exchange was helpful, the posters also. However, we needed more space and time for this event.

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- If felt a little rushed. There are a few of people I would have liked to talk to that I didn't get too and break-out sessions that I didn't attend because they were running concurrently. Perhaps rerunning the same open-space break-out groups for a second group of interested participants could address. Or some more "free" time to visit with people who had similar interests might have helped.
- Being overwhelmed by the EcoFarm crowd on the last night at dinner made it difficult to locate the people we might have caught up with and spoken with at dinner. Perhaps the group could have dinner in side-room in this case.
- *Yes, the networking aspect of the program was fantastic. I was quite interested in the role of interdisciplinary education/training in preparing one for the job market. Where do those trained in such a way end up? How are programs structured to be 'interdisciplinary' rather than simply 'multidisciplinary'? These were always very well attended sessions.*
- *Yes, mostly it was up to us [the participants] and it worked well.*
- *I hope in our focus on SA we do not neglect the larger issue of sustainable living.*
- *In general, the conference served my needs very well. It allowed me to think through with others the many issues I have been working on independently.*
- *Better balance between formats: Need to shift balance toward more focused workshops and presentations and less time in open, interactive discussions/conversations.*
- *Invite alternative institutions (holistic mngt., Ecology Action, etc)*
- *Convene groups based on school program goals and needs, or roles in program (e.g. – farm managers).*
- *More diversity in participants. Include those outside academic institutions.*
- *More time to share our programs.*
- *Need to discuss sustainability in general, what that means and how SA fits into society.*
- *Greater encouragement of the exchange of lecture notes, syllabi, and other educ. resources.*
- *Yes – the format allowed me to feel like I had a say in what I was learning.*
- *Yes – though I would liked to have had more in-depth conversations on particular subtopics. It was challenging to switch topics frequently.*
- *The format really helped me hear the viewpoints from many people and find commonalities btw those many viewpoints and perspectives on this movement.*

### ***3. What was most useful about the conference? Why?***

- Most useful for me was being exposed to the forum methodologies of Open Space and World Cafés, and by having them led by such sensitive and thoughtful leaders. Why? These methods are so brightening compared to the power dynamics that are immediately set up by our traditional lecture:passive-learning/raising-hands presentation styles.
- Small group interactions and the positive creative energy of the facilitators and the group.
- To get a good perspective of how different our challenges and interests are. I came away feeling that sustainable agriculture is still in its incipient stages, still hard to define, and a paradox to teach (in the current academic paradigm). There is much work to be done. However, this is also very encouraging. I feel something very positive was built with all the right motivations, and all the right people.
- I thought it was really great to have undergrads, graduate students, faculty, and various other staff persons there to provide input. I would like to see the group grow. I think offering the conference free to students will keep their voice in the circle.
- Many of the one-to-one or small group discussions in the groups that had similar interests and had experience with the issues/challenges I am also working on or seeking advice with were most helpful. The curriculum exchange session was also very helpful to gather new info. and ideas.  
In short, I was able to gather information that addressed my specific needs.
- *Networking*
- *Developing new contacts and networks to aid in student recruitment.*
- *The World Cafes and interaction with others.*
- *To meet with like-minded folks and become aware of the "bigger issues" [in sustainable agriculture education].*
- *[Provided] a good snapshot of where post –secondary sustainable agriculture education is right now.*
- *Learning about all the US programs in sust. ag.*
- *The opportunity to interact one on one with so many conference participants.*
- *Learning about different approaches to SA edu. Programs and shared challenges and insights.*
- *The opportunity to speak with so many like-minded people.*

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- *Meeting with colleagues to help with solving shared problems and networking.*
  - *Time to talk with colleagues: Networking and collective problem solving.*
  - *Meeting so many others with similar interests and issues. Student and admin. Involvement, also NGOs.*
  - *Networking and contacts.*
  - *The resources exchange.*
  - *The dynamic nature of the WC and OST made for meaningful and useful discussions. Good to interact with people from all over the US.*
  - *Seeing the incredible span of "sustainable education" programs and definitions.*
  - *Listening and learning from others involved in similar issues, specific techniques and ideas for innovating.*
  - *Poster session.*
  - *Interaction with others and finding out what is going on in other programs.*
  - *The supportive environment for progressive ideas; ability to develop networking opportunities.*
  - *Modeling of an interactive and engaging process for learning from each other.*
  - *Learning about other programs, pitfalls and difficulties of offering interdisciplinary SA curriculum.*
  - *Networking and breadth of topics (a little bit of depth).*
  - *Meeting so many people.*
  - *Being energized by finding out how many people are working in this area and have hope for continued growth.*
4. *What was least useful about the conference? Why?*
- *Perhaps the presentations of S.A. undergrad programs? As mentioned above -- perhaps it was the late hour...afterall, it was helpful to hear of other programs*
  - *At one point all of the students were in a World café group together, and were having a particularly intense "crucial conversation" of the kind the conference was meant to evoke. We should have just left and met out on the beach because we got on our own track. So at that point the interruptions of the facilitator and the "write this on a piece of paper and post it" were very distracting. I think if we had been encouraged from the beginning to take off for a little bit if we got going in a good direction, that would have been helpful.*
  - *Probably the poster session. I think I would have liked instead more time for the PowerPoint presentations [program presentations].*
  - *At times, I felt we were so rushed with all these ideas that it was hard to take a step back and breathe. So many people were very excited to be there & sharing that this was a mute point. It was very uplifting and the enthusiasm was contagious. There were times when I felt I had a part to contribute, but felt it was sometimes hard & intimidating to speak to these people with all this experience.*
  - *The timing (3<sup>rd</sup> week of the semester) and location. I spent a full day traveling to get to the conference and a full day to return home. It was a major time commitment and expensive trip.*
  - *I enjoyed the open space and world café structure; however I would also have liked to have seen at least 1 day dedicated to concurrent sessions on topics of interest. I was eager to learn details about others programs and initiatives, and found that I was only able to scratch the surface in using the world café/open space format. I wanted more in-depth knowledge of some areas. I would like to see panel presentations of the diverse ways in which student organic farms are used in curriculum, for example.*
  - *Many discussions were repetitive and needed to be better managed by small-group facilitators.*
  - *Too much commentary at the very end by conference organizers.*
  - *Discussions were repeatedly interrupted in order to move to the next session. Perhaps a balance of Café and Open Space with traditional formats: workshops, panel discussions, etc.*
  - *The tasks after 10:00 am on day 2. The move from framing questions to "action items" was too theoretical and not interesting to me.*
  - *Some structured time to discuss the definition of sustainability.*
  - *Too much time sitting and talking.*
  - *A few too many Cafes for my needs – but the World Cafés are great to get the program started.*
  - *Too much moving around and changing of topics when the discussions were just getting going and fruitful. More time in individual workshop/breakout sessions.*
  - *Kiln was too small of a room for many activities: Posters, whole group meetings (OST) and multiple group meetings.*
  - *Late evening program presentations on Tuesday.*

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### 5. *What topics or issues were not discussed in the conference that should be addressed were similar events planned in the future?*

- A national organization might be different that organizing nationally, and I think working together, discussing together what we need to do to actually build solutions to the questions we are asking about sustainable agriculture as academics. To not only talk about institutions, but talk about radical teaching, talk about hunger and poverty, not just soil science and IPM; talk about where sustainable agriculture is and is not. But, I tend to be rather idealistic...It just seems to me that we could do more – some have been in this discipline for a long time – some highschoools especially. And small farms are not likely to line up across the country; our organization as academics needs to be more.
- How to involve other stakeholders, growers, extension workers etc. in this conversation. I know the conversation has to start somewhere, but if it stays isolated in academic circles I think that would be a big loss.
- I would have liked to hear the voice of the farmer to see where the people outside the institutions are seeing. I would have also liked to have heard about sustainable agriculture programs internationally (not just those that people from the US collaborate with).
- How to garner resources and support from USDA and the Organic industry. I realize this is partly my responsibility. If I wanted to discuss it, I should have suggested it as a break out topic for discussion. But there were other topics I was more interested in discussing first.
- In the future, a keynote address/speaker would be helpful as a focal point and catalyst to start.
- Integrate "conventional ag." educators and farmers and find a common ground.
- Funding for SA educ. programs.
- Many topics were introduced – I would have enjoyed having more time for depth and action planning, several case studies or workshops.
- Specific techniques in teaching farming, economics, business, marketing curricula.
- The economic aspects of agricultural sustainability.
- How to include underrepresented communities in the conference.
- International issues (students and farmers from abroad).
- Teaching resources and teaching methods.
- Empowering students to annex campus lands for gardens.
- Labor and other social issues. How do we link students, faculty and staff with labor?
- Another conference (annual) could address the establishment of a SA national or international organization.
- Future conferences should focus around a small number of major topics.
- The role that NGOs can play in contributing to SA programs.
- Teaching methods (didactics, andragogy) and approaches.
- Learning strategies that are particularly useful in SA courses.
- With all the times that K-12 education came up in discussions, it might be good to include those educators too.

### 6. *Would you like to see a follow up or annual meeting of post-secondary sustainable agriculture educators? Why or why not? Where should it take place?*

- Another conference: Yes. Why – because we ought to talk together – the learning is huge. I am open to where – I don't really have a preference: in some ways, it could get a strong following by staying, and it could or not expose more by rotating nationally.
- YES! Asilomar! So we can actually do this national organization thing right...we have to get together again.
- Yes, absolutely. It should take place in the middle of US so everyone can attend.
- I think a follow up would be great. I like that it was attached to the eco-farm this year & would recommend keeping the main meeting then. It would be nice to have a meeting in 6 months just to try to get this off the ground. A lot of time can be lost in a year. The rhythm needs to be kept going. Maybe there could be regional meetings along with the annual conference.
- Also, I have a number of colleagues and students whom would like to attend but couldn't afford the time to travel there and expense. Therefore, for equal access to people in the eastern part of the US, I suggest the conference be held in different regions each year. Perhaps North Carolina next?
- *Yes, definitely. Even though I am on the East coast, I would still very much like for this conference to be held with EcoFarm or another similar conference.*
- Yes, It should take place outside of California to promote the movement in other regions of the US.
- Maybe not annual but a continuation would be good.

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- I think so, but do it every 2 years or so. It is too much work to organize annually and probably too expensive.
  - Yes, perhaps in 2 years. Perhaps a smaller action-oriented groups could meet to work on specific topics.
  - Yes, maybe biannual – Southeast or Asilomar if in winter. Northeast or Great Lakes in summer.
  - Definitely. The first meeting was great for networking and creating community and language around this topic. A second meeting could allow for real action.
  - Yes. A similar “retreat” setting – Asilomar was great.
  - Move to a higher level of study/analysis – concrete course or curricula examination, methods of exploration, etc.
  - Bring more Canadian academics and students into the mix of participants.
  - Yes, Cal Poly SLO.
  - Yes, Asilomar seems a good place. Organize the conference at the beginning or end of a given week (e.g. – Mon./Tues., Thursday/Fri, Fri/Sat).
  - Yes, somewhere more accessible to more regions.
  - Yes, Perhaps in Davis or Santa Cruz and include on onsite component.
  - Meeting should be held every 2 years. The location of the conference should be changed each time on a rotational basis. Action items (3-5) should come out of each meeting.
  - Yes! It should be held at Asilomar next year with Ecofarm.
  - Yes, perhaps a biannual one.
  - Yes, again this was such a helpful experience, and with such a format it seems it would continue to be helpful.
7. *Do you have any suggestions for the further development of the field of sustainable agriculture education that were not discussed in the conference? In particular, do you think those working in the area of post-secondary sustainable agriculture education should become more formally organized? If so, in what ways?*
- Organization could mean laying out principles/themes each year during the conference that need addressing in the world – and brainstorming next steps: in curriculum, in teaching methodology, in graduate study, in sustainable ag. development; alternatively, each university/college’s home needs may be place-specific, and can bend and flux to their needs – I suppose the factor of organization, and how that happens is literally determined by what educators/educated feel their role is in sustainable agriculture.
  - I definitely think there is something to gain by examining long-existing S.A. institutions – some are secondary institutions; so inviting them or a “key note speaker” – But would that interrupt the Open Space methodology? We can all be keynote speakers – however, it seemed to me our elders in sust. ag education were not in attendance...where is the learning then – if my mentor’s mentor doesn’t come?
  - My suggestion would be to have more folks from the inner city join us. Not enough representation from minorities. It would be helpful to keep addressing those issues at the rural/urban interface, and how sustainable agriculture seems more attractive to certain cultures, and not to others.
  - I like the concept that campuses & disciplines are moving towards sustainability. I value the information going to those who don’t expect to come across it. A capstone course of sorts incorporating sustainability in the various disciplines would be great at individual universities. I think all courses should have an element of sustainability to them. I would like to see agricultural issues getting to universities that don’t have agriculture attached to them. These people are the consumers and in order for us to change the system, it is important to spread the word outside of our own circles.
  - I think it would be beneficial to be more formally organized [e.g. - national organization]. But I also think that we shouldn’t over-work and demand too much of our already overworked community of sustainable agriculture educators. Perhaps meetings every-other year would be easier to organize, finance, attend than annual meetings.
  - *Again, professional development issues of those training to be ‘interdisciplinary educators’. Where do we fit in?*
  - *We should be working together to develop a joint grant proposal to track graduates from specific programs. One specific example I can think of would be to develop a database of numbers of website hits, numbers of graduates, career tracks, and success rate; all of which would help those of us who are developing programs put some meat in our own proposals to develop sustainable agriculture degree programs.*
  - *Yes, more formal organization [e.g. – a national organization] is needed with strong direction and leadership!*
  - *Yes a national network or association.*
  - *See NCATA. There may be an existing working group in SA.*
  - *Yes, National Org. to facilitate the ongoing exchange of ideas.*
  - Perhaps – Should happen only if there are clearly defined goals to work toward.
  - Yes, great idea.

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- I would like to see more attention given to the integration of international issues and experiences into curricula, both undergrad and grad., but esp. a web site for communication, promotion and resource sharing.
  - How to develop structure and curricula that will attract under-represented students (and faculty).
  - Yes, organizing more formally to continue the sharing of ideas and resources via listservs and interactive websites.
  - A newsletter with spotlights SA programs.
  - Yes, but not yet. Perhaps in a year or two. Don't organizations already exist with that mission?
  - Yes to formal organization. Loose affiliation with long-term agenda, all members agreeing to work on that agenda in the next year (e.g. – land-based curriculum development; acquiring land for program space; navigating the politics of institutional resistance to SA programs).
  - The proposed national organization is a great idea. It occurs to me that could be interesting to hold the next 90r future meetings) in conjunction with a national professional society – just before or after – and alternate between various societies (e.g. – Ag. and Human Values; SSSA/ASA/CSA; ;Hort Sci).
8. *Other suggestions or comments:*
- The limited size of the conference feels essential to the ability to building a conference community/networking.
  - Thanks so much for making this happen! It felt historically significant and I was honored to be a part of it!
  - This was a thoroughly amazing experience. Thank you for all of your inspiring work and collaborative efforts on this conference. Revolutionary; thank you.
  - Thank you, keep up the good work.
  - I thought you all did a fabulous job with the conference. I would love to keep up on the progress that is made in the next few years. Thanks for all your hard work!
  - Overall an excellent conference experience!
  - This was the most effective conference format that I have experienced in 40 years of attending conferences! Congrats!
  - Serve local and organic food.
  - Integrate physical activities into the conference.
  - A special thanks to the planning and facilitation team. Great Job. Nice teamwork. Responsive. Flexible.
  - The organizers are to be commended for a well planned and thought provoking event.
  - The date is challenging for those of us who have just started classes in Jan.