

Sustainable Agriculture

*Rick Gibson, Extension Agent, Agriculture, University of Arizona
Cooperative Extension, Pinal County*

Have you ever wondered if your County Extension Agent or Natural Resources Conservation (NRCS) professional really understands your needs? Are you trying to grow produce organically on a small farm and do not know where to turn for sound, local advice? Are you afraid that when you use the word “biodynamic” people will look at you strangely and wonder what you are talking about?

If any of these scenarios seem to fit your situation, then you need to know about SARE, the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education programs sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Tailored for people and farm or ranch operations that want to do things just a little differently, the SARE programs across the country help producers of all sizes meet the challenges of producing food and fiber in a sustainable manner.

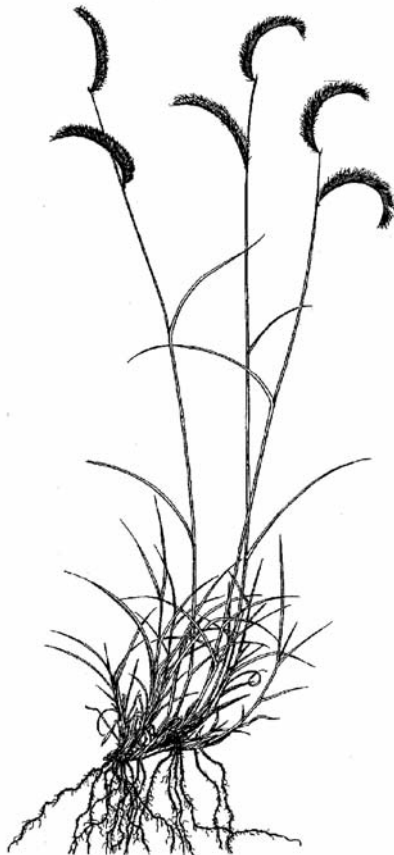
According to a survey of the Four Corners states, by Gary Thompson at the University of Arizona Department of Agriculture and Resource Economics, organic growers in Arizona had gross sales revenues of \$500,000 to \$1 million in 2005. Crops included herbs, citrus, grapes, mixed vegetables and wine. In the region, the majority (53%) sold their crops wholesale, while 30% sold directly to consumers, and 17% sold retail. Thompson asked growers “why use organics?” Their response may surprise you. Thirty-five percent said to receive higher prices; 29% believe in the organic philosophy, 13% for better health, and 8% for better market access

Sustainable Agriculture is:

- Economically viable: If it is not profitable, it is not sustainable.
- Socially supportive: The quality of life of farmers, farm families and farm communities is important.
- Ecologically sound: We must preserve the resource base that sustains us all.

For more information about the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, visit <http://cals.arizona.edu/extension/sustainableag>. Once there, look for the free pamphlet “Sustaining Agriculture in Arizona” that you can download directly to your own printer. You will also find links to the Western Region and national SARE websites. These sources are loaded with information that may just help you feel at home. If you have questions about any SARE-related topics, just ask your County Extension Agent or local NRCS professional. You may also contact the Arizona SARE Coordinator, Rick Gibson, at 520.836.5221 extension 227, or by email at gibsonrd@cals.arizona.edu.

Featured Plant



*Rob Grumbles, Extension Agent, Agriculture, University of Arizona
Cooperative Extension, Mohave County*

Common Name: Blue Grama
Scientific Name: *Bouteloua gracilis*

Description: This warm season native grass is a perennial bunch grass that usually grows 6 to 20 inches tall. Blue grama is found at elevations from 1,000 to 8,000 feet on rocky slopes, plains, forest openings and mountain meadows. Blue grama flowers from July to October and reproduces by both tillering and seed. In Arizona, plants usually grow in the tuft or bunchgrass form and can be fairly large.

Forage Value: Blue grama is one of the best forage species in the southwest. It is highly palatable and holds up well to grazing and drought conditions. It can provide nutritious forage throughout the year.

Management: Blue grama is one of the more grazing-tolerant native grass plants. For the best response, defer grazing for part of the growing season at least every 2 to 3 years. Blue grama is best rested from grazing in the fall prior to dormancy.