

ARE Faculty Profile

COOPERATIVE Extension Specialist Karen Klonsky joined the UC Davis Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics in 1981, having earned her Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from Michigan State University. She works in the areas of farm and financial management.

Her primary interest is in decision-making at the farm level, with an emphasis on sustainable and organic farming systems. Dr. Klonsky is involved in several interdisciplinary research projects studying the feasibility of alternative farming practices. These include the Sustainable Agriculture Farming Systems (SAFS) project located on the Davis campus, the Long-Term Research on Agricultural Systems (LTRAS) project located in Davis, the Lodi-Woodbridge Winegrape Commission, and the Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems (BIOS) program in Merced County.

A fundamental goal of alternative agriculture is to reduce non-renewable resource use and environmental degradation while maintaining productivity and profitability. Dr. Klonsky's research addresses the question of relative resource use and profitability of alternative farming systems from two perspectives. In one line of research she develops farm simulation models from field trial data. The models use the same practices and yield results as the field trial, simulating the labor, capital and material requirements that would be required at the farm level. The models estimate the profitability and risks associated with adopting the experimental practices. Second, she works from the business records of operating farms to develop case studies in the adoption of alternative practices.

From the results of these studies, it is clear that the potential and challenges in adoption of alternative farming practices varies for different crops. In the SAFS project, now beginning its tenth growing season, corn and beans have been successfully grown with reduced inputs while maintaining yields. Safflower showed less potential due to pest and weed problems that reduced yields compared to the conventional system. The cost of growing processing tomatoes without synthetic inputs proved to be much higher than for conventional tomatoes mostly due to higher costs associated with hand hoeing and alternative nitrogen sources. Tomato yields were comparable for all systems in most years. However, the price premium for organic tomatoes makes this a profitable crop.

Dr. Klonsky's research on production practices fostered her interest in growers' motivation for adopting



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sustainable practices. Her current research involves a three year study of farmers, linking goals and management styles to the choice of production practices.

Dr. Klonsky works with county-based UC Farm Advisors to develop cost and return studies for the major crops in California. She has also collaborated on a series of cost and return studies for organic production. The studies include information about current best farming practices, resource requirements for crop production, monthly costs and investment requirements. Studies of perennial crops include detailed costs for orchard and vineyard development. They serve as a valuable resource for growers, bankers, appraisers, industry, policy makers and other researchers.

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Her list of publications and the index of available cost of production studies can be accessed through her Web page at: <http://www.agecon.ucdavis.edu/Faculty/Karen.K/Klonsky.html>