

SCHOOL NEWS

Dairy's grand opening draws large crowd

By Tarleton State University

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STEPHENVILLE, TEXAS—One of the most anticipated construction projects on Tarleton State University's campus took its first step toward completion on Feb. 27. The university's Southwest Regional Dairy Center, which is designed to be a model dairy, broke ground at the construction site with a ceremonial cow, plow and milking.

The highly anticipated center is expected to be a premier learning and research dairy serving Texas and its surrounding states. A crowd of approximately 300 gathered in support of the dairy, which will serve as "the" dairy of research and learning for The Texas A&M University System as well as the state of Texas.

Dr. Don Cawthon, dean of the College of Agriculture and Human Sciences, started the ceremony with a brief synopsis of how the idea for the dairy started, who was instrumental in bringing it to life and what the ultimate goal for the dairy will be when it is finally completed.

"We anticipate stocking the dairy in January, maybe February 2010, and begin milking then," Cawthon said. "There will be more than one phase to the dairy. The first phase will include a rotary parlor, several teaching labs, a classroom, a few offices and a 300-cow capacity."

The second phase will include those things as well as bringing the herd capacity up to 600 cows and building a creamery that can produce dairy products such as cheese, milk, ice cream and many more.

After the Cawthon's opening remarks, others who addressed the crowd included: Tarleton President F. Dominic Dottavio; Representative Sid Miller (District 59); Congressman John Carter (R-TX); Dr. Larry Boleman, Associate Vice Chancellor of Texas AgriLife Research; Nancy Hunter, Stephenville mayor; Tab Thompson, Erath County judge; and John Cowan, executive director of the Texas Association of Dairywomen.

For the official ceremony, "Annie" (one of the university's prize dairy cows) was harnessed to a vintage 1940s plow with President Dottavio at the reins. The remaining members of the group were given golden shovels to use to turn the dirt. Afterward, President Dottavio and Representative Miller were given the opportunity to participate in producing the purest dairy product by milking Annie. Audience members could also milk Annie if they chose to.

A representative for Landmark Structures Inc., one of the dairy's first industry partners, was also on hand for the event.

Because the center will serve the southwest region of the United States, it will be designed to accommodate many research projects.

"We plan to open the dairy center up to other universities in the region so that they may also be able to use it for research and learning opportunities," said Dr. Barry Lambert, department head and dairy science specialist. "We are working with others in the design phase so it will be useful to other universities and other groups, including industry."

In addition to traditional dairy science research, other research applications that will be conducted at the center include business, finance, engineering, medical, animal behavior, labor management, energy recovery from agricultural wastes and environmental sciences. It will also serve as a center for agricultural undergraduate research.

Key points in the innovative design of the center include a rotary parlor, auto animal ID and multiple energy recovery systems. A start-up company in Waco, called EQMA, already has plans to build a demonstration plant at the center that will be able to turn manure into ethanol. Other industry partners are developing plans for methane, algae, biodiesel and additional innovative energy conversion technologies.

“Eventually, we would love for energy recovery systems at the dairy to help offset a portion or all of the facility’s electrical costs,” Lambert said.

Because of its location in the Bosque River watershed, much effort is being made to make the facility as environmentally friendly as possible.

“Restrictions are different in this watershed than others,” Lambert said. “Our environmental engineers are working with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to make sure the dairy has the minimal environmental impact that science currently allows.”

Future research and development will further refine and enhance the technology to lessen the center’s environmental impact.

The main architectural engineering firm for the project is Hanfeld Hoffer Stanford, which is based out of Fort Worth. However assisting in the center’s design is Five G Consulting, which is a dairy design company.