

## Jefferson County learns about hosting Farm Technology Days

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JEFFERSON — Jefferson County is looking at potentially hosting what's been called the "Superbowl of agriculture" — Wisconsin Farm Technology Days.

About 20 people attended an informational meeting Monday morning at the University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension office in Jefferson. The gathering was set to help "clear up" questions that Jefferson County UW-Extension Education Committee and UW-Extension agents had regarding changes in the management model.

It was led by Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc. (WFTD) general manager Matt Glewen and provided a description of the show and organization in general; responsibilities county government and residents, including the host farm, would be expected to take on; and potential financial impacts on the county.

Glewen noted that WFTD is one of the largest farm shows in the United States and the only outdoor farm show of its size that is held in a different county and run almost in its entirety by a new group of volunteers each year.

"The differences from other shows ... (are that) there's a strong leadership development component; education is a primary part of the show; volunteer development; and it's actually held on a producer's farm," Glewen explained. "WFTD's vision is "to be the premier self-sustaining showcase for agriculture and related industries."

Similarly, its mission is to "promote technology and share knowledge in, and of, agriculture and related industries through joint efforts of communities, business and industry, education and agencies."

Previously known as Wisconsin Farm Progress Days, the show began as a plowing contest in 1954 in Waupaca County. It was the idea of Henry Ahlgren, the first chancellor of UW-Extension, and started as a partnership between the agriculture industry and UW-Extension.

Since its inception, WFTD has been held in more than 30 counties, including twice in Jefferson County, in 1956 and 1984.

Today, the three-day show typically draws 40,000 to 50,000 people to explore the 70 or so acres of exhibit space filled with around 600 vendors — also known as Tent City — as well as the 400 acres worth of field demonstrations.

“(Exhibits) are really the heart of what happens at this show,” Glewen said. “Commercial exhibitors talking to producers and others in agriculture about new technology. That’s really what the show boils down to.”

Some of the main areas in “Tent City” are the Progress Pavilion Tent, the Applied Technology Center, the Family Living Tent, the Youth Tent and Innovation Square.

The Progress Pavilion Tent features organizations such as the UW-Extension, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, among others.

Glewen said that the Applied Technology Center is “essentially UW-Extension’s educational area.” It features topics such as renewable energy, electronic animal ID, plastic recycling and agricultural safety.

The Family Living Tent focuses on family living issues and also serves as the main stage for the show.

The Youth Tent has become more of a “youth campus,” according to Glewen. Organizations such as county 4-H, the Boys and Girls Club and UW Biotech Center hold activities there.

“Innovation Square was something new last year,” Glewen said. “It’s right in the middle of Tent City where companies that are selected for their new and innovative products display them. It’s also a place for counties to kind of do their thing.”

A large part of exhibiting involves field demos.

“There are about 30 farm shows in the U.S. roughly the size that we are,” Glewen said. “Probably half are a little bit smaller and half are a little bit bigger. We have the most extensive field demos of any of those shows, only because we’re moving it onto an actual farm and we have the capability of using crop acres. This is a big deal for our farm machinery exhibitors, that they can actually demo their machinery.”

Additional attractions include multiple food tents, all of which are run by nonprofit organizations from the host county, a horse area and a farm tour, which typically draws at least half of attendees.

Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc. is an independent business organization. It is a tax-exempt 503(c5), but is not a nonprofit, and is governed by a board of directors. Glewen noted that the board’s goals are to provide overall direction and policy for the shows and to work with the general manager to implement policy.

The board is composed of four exhibitors; two producers, one at-large and a previous host; four state agencies, the state Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Technical College System;

three federal agencies, Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Rural Development & Cooperatives; one person from UW-Extension and one from UW-Madison.

In addition, the organization has three or four employees, depending on the time of year: Glewen, the general manager, who runs the day-to-day operations of the show; Anna Maenner and Tiffany Chadwick, commercial exhibits coordinators who provide consistent, year-round contact with exhibitors; and Jim Pody, the show electrician who works for four weeks setting up the electrical grid and inventories and stores WFTD equipment.

### **Who is involved?**

Glewen said that anyone from the host county who wants to can be involved in the show.

“You think all the people in the county know each other, but when you hold a show like this, you’ll find out how many people don’t know each other,” Glewen said. “The show is actually kind of a leadership incubator because the planning for the show goes over a period of about three to three-and-a-half years.”

In the end, it takes about 1,500 volunteers devoting various amounts of time to make the three-day show happen. The majority of those 1,500 volunteers only work the week of the show, Glewen said.

Main planning entities are:

- County government.

“The whole beginning of this show starts with county government and the (Jefferson County) UW-Extension Education Committee,” Glewen said. “Collectively, the UW-Extension office and the UW-Extension Education Committee decides that maybe having the show would be a good thing. They go to the county board with a resolution asking for \$20,000 seed money and \$30,000 that would support the commercial exhibits coordinator.”

Once the county government has confirmed the county’s acceptance of hosting the show, committees begin to be formed, starting with the Executive Committee.

“The show is completely separate from county government once the Executive Committee is formed,” Glewen said. “The only connection to the county (government), then, is maybe through some of the county employees that are involved with the show. Like the Extension Office and sometimes a little bit from the Highway Department and a whole lot from the Sheriff’s Office with traffic — but the liability part of it and the financial part of it is separate.”

“They manage the funds, all the administrative parts of the show. There’s really no connection to county government at all any more. Sometimes that’s a little confusing. It kind of starts out with county government and then it goes off on its own.

- Committees.

The Executive Committee, which is not a committee of the county board, typically consists of 16 people.

“The reason it’s 16 people is there are 16 standing committees and that allows us to have a liaison from each of the committees to the Executive Committee,” Glewen said. “The 16 committees each have a chair and co-chair. There’s usually five to 10 people on each of those committees. If you do the math, we’re looking at about 180 to 200 people that are involved in the planning of the show over a three- to three-and-a-half-year period.”

The committees recruit another 300 or 400 volunteers to help them. In addition, it takes 600 or 700 people to run the food tents.

- Host farm.

One of the first things the Executive Committee does is select the host farm.

“They take the farms that are interested in hosting the show and they weigh all these things,” Glewen said. “Where are they located? Can you get to them on the roads? How is the land situated? — all those things weigh in to who’s selected as a host farm.”

The host family can be as involved or uninvolved as they want to be, Glewen said, noting that he has had hosts with next to no involvement and others who are “up to their eyeballs” in committees and other planning efforts.

“People have often thought the host farms make a lot of money — they don’t,” he added. “They’re provided seed and fertilizer. Seed for establishing all the acres that will be used by the show, which would be 550 to 600. Most of those acres are going to end up in some kind of a forage crop. In this part of the world, it’s alfalfa usually because we need a good base for Tent City and parking and most of our field demos are based on alfalfa.

“So they get seed (and) fertilizer for one year to establish the crop,” the general manager continued. “Crop protection products if they’d have to use a herbicide. That typically runs \$90,000 to \$110,000 to buy all the seed, fertilizer and herbicide. Fortunately, the Executive Committee often gets a lot of that donated by agri-businesses.”

Because there are few farms that have 600 acres of alfalfa, crop rotation disruption almost is guaranteed, Glewen said. While only about 400 acres are needed for crop demonstrations, another 85 to 90 are needed for parking, plus the 70 acres for Tent City.

Glewen recalled a discussion with a group of potential host farms during a previous event.

One farmer stood up and asked why anyone would ever do this. Another replied, “because, how many people get to say they had the Superbowl of agriculture on their farm?”

- UW-Extension.

“A lot of times, people think that the show is put on by either Extension or the University of Wisconsin and that’s not exactly true, ... but the relationship is so tight that it looks like that,” Glewen explained. “There really is no formal relationship with those entities. UW-Madison and UW-Extension actually contribute \$13,500 to support education at the show. The state board gives Extension another \$18,000, so there’s quite a few dollars put into education every year.

“The other thing that makes it look like it’s a UW function is we actually have our surplus, rainy-day funds managed by the UW Foundation,” he added. “So that’s another real close tie to the university that makes it appear like the show is run by the university.”

### **Financial impacts**

Glewen explained that, when the show was held in Pierce County, it commissioned River Falls to do an economic impact study. The study revealed the impact to the county was around \$1.86 million.

“The reason it’s not any bigger is because about 85 percent of the people who come to the show come and go. They don’t stay overnight,” Glewen said. “The biggest impact is from the 600 exhibitors who are there a week-and-a-half ahead of time, filling up the hotels and eating in restaurants. So there’s some impact, but it’s not as much as one where everybody comes and stays for four nights.”

Sources of income from Wisconsin Farm Technology Days include lot and booth rental, gate receipts, food sales, commemorative toy sales, miscellaneous promotion items and sponsorships.

“Lot and booth rental is the biggest source,” Glewen said. “About 70 percent of the income comes in from that and that will add up to about a little under \$500,000. All the money from the show, every penny of it, comes into the county Executive Committee and then at the end of the year, 70 percent of the lot and booth rental stays here and 30 percent goes to the state organization.”

Gate receipts, which generate between \$160,000 and \$180,000, are split 50-50 between the state and the Executive Committee.

“Food sales, and that typically will add up to \$80,000 to \$120,000 profit, all stays in the county and that’s given to the nonprofit organizations that run the food tents,” Glewen said. “A lot of counties sell a commemorative toy as a fundraiser and 100 percent of that stays in the county. Some of the committees, like the Family Living Committee, sells cookbooks, sometimes the Promotion Committee sells clothing — promotional hats, shirts, whatever — and that all stays here. The county does a fundraising operation for the show and 100 percent of that stays here.”

In the end, the Executive Committee makes between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

“That profit is dispersed in the county by the Executive Committee and the only stipulations on how that’s dispersed is, it has to be used for youth- or agricultural-related things,” Glewen said. “That’s pretty broad. Sometimes they do scholarships, sometimes grants — it’s different in every county — but those dollars are left to stay in the county.”

After the conclusion of the presentation, LaVern Georgson, Jefferson County’s UW-Extension agriculture agent, said he believes the presentation helped address some questions and concerns.

“I hope this helps really clearly share facts and give us a little bit more of an idea of what the state expects and what our roles and responsibilities are going to be as we move forward with this,” he said. “It’s a terrific opportunity; we just want to make sure that Jefferson County is well presented.”

Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Chairperson Jim Schroeder agreed.

“It’s an exciting opportunity. It’s an opportunity for Jefferson County to shine, but we want to make sure, before we make the jump into doing this, that we’ll have the capacity to make it an excellent show,” Schroeder said. “I think right now people are still gathering information.”

Persons with questions may contact Georgson at (920) 674-7295.