

## Panel advances concept of county as host

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JEFFERSON — A resolution supporting and authorizing Jefferson County to host Wisconsin Farm Technology Days in 2019 will go before the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors during its September meeting.

The resolution was approved by the University Extension Education Committee during its meeting Monday. However, approval by both bodies does not necessarily mean that Jefferson County will be chosen to host the event.

The final decision on which county will host the event is that of Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc., which jointly supports and plans each event with the host county's University of Wisconsin-Extension Office. One of the criteria used to select a host county is the amount of support and interest demonstrated by a prospective county's board of supervisors.

The last time Jefferson County hosted Wisconsin Farm Technology Days was 1984 and it still was called Farm Progressive Days. It took place in Grellton in the northern portion of the county.

More recently, in 2009, the event was held at Crave Brothers Farm in the Town of Portland, just outside of near Waterloo in Dodge County. Officials said at the time that the three-day event drew approximately 80,000 visitors to the farm.

As approved by the committee Monday, the resolution states that hosting Wisconsin Farm Technology Days is an excellent way to showcase Jefferson County, develop volunteerism and leadership roles, and promote county agriculture. Also, it states that, according to a UW-River Falls study, the total economic impact of hosting the event is approximately \$1.86 million, creation of 33 jobs and generation of \$191,000 in additional taxes.

The county board also would budget \$20,000 in the 2017 county budget to be used prior to and/or during the 2019 Wisconsin Farm Technology Days event to support or advance ongoing activities and functions involved with the event. An additional \$30,000 would need to be budgeted in the 2018 county budget to fund a limited-term Wisconsin Farm Technology Days, Inc. employee who would work prior to, during and following the event.

“We’re recommending this resolution so we can continue to move the process along,” LaVern Georgson, Jefferson County UW-Extension agriculture agent, said. “There’s a clause in there that says, ‘dependent on a site.’”

“The big piece of the puzzle that we don’t know right now is if we have a defined site,” he added. “We would hope that a site would be secured by the end of this year, for sure by the first quarter of 2017.”

The agriculture agent said he has followed up with farmers who, early on, had indicated interest in hosting the event.

“The way their farming businesses are structured, and things like that, they can’t put together what now looks like a minimum of 300 to 350 acres of alfalfa,” Georgson said. “Once we move this process along, there might be people that I’m not aware of in the community that, when they realize that we’re committed to this process, they would step forward.”

Jefferson County Administrator Ben Wehmeier said that probably the most important thing is that there are people who have expressed interest.

“The issue is the 550 acres,” he said. “I think, now that there’s been some ‘flexibility,’ that may help make it a little more (appealing).”

The production impact on the host farm would be “fairly minimal,” according to Georgson.

“They might lose a cutting,” he said, noting that typically one gets three to five cuttings of alfalfa. “So, where Tent City itself is located, they would cut that probably three or four weeks before the show because then they go out and lay out the streets and vendor plots, and things like that. Then, where parking is, they’d cut that (crop) about a week before the show.

The ag agent said it has been discussed that if that much alfalfa cannot be found, could farmers plant some winter wheat.

“I had some conversations with the general manager about that last week — if part of those acres could come from winter wheat,” Georgson said. “They didn’t use it for parking, but they did some field demonstrations this past year with winter wheat ... so that’s a possibility.”

Money is given to the host farm to help with seeding and fertilizer for the first year, he said.

“You’ve got to get it in the rotation and have it established,” Georgson said. “You don’t want to have it the first year because the alfalfa’s not going to be established well enough. The second year it’s doing pretty well, so ideally you’d like to have a two- or three-year-old stand so it can hold together.”

There is effort after the show, he noted, to restore the land back to as good a condition as possible.

“Pending county board adoption of this, we’ll have a group of people begin to form the Executive Committee as we move into September, and then try to identify a farm by late fall or winter at the latest,” Georgson said. “There are some possible (host farms), but at this point we don’t have anybody that’s firm.”