

Jefferson County to host Farm Technology Days

By Kevin Murphy Special to the Union | Posted: Tuesday, September 20, 2016 12:55 pm

MADISON — Jefferson County will host Farm Technology Days 2019, a three-day event that brings in tens of thousands of visitors to view the state’s agricultural developments in the field.

Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc. Chairperson John Shutske announced that the organization’s board of directors accepted Jefferson County’s application for holding the show, to take place in July 2019 on a yet-to-be selected host farm.

Factors that played into Jefferson County’s selection include “that the county has not held the show for a long time,” said Matt Glewen, Wisconsin Farm Technology Days general manager. “They haven’t held the show since 1984, so it’s essentially ‘their turn.’ Jefferson County is a very strong agricultural county and it’s very centrally located in south-central Wisconsin. All those factors together are in favor of holding the show there in 2019.”

With over \$1.8 billion in economic activity and nearly 8,000 jobs created by agriculture, Jefferson County is ideally positioned to host one of the largest outdoor farm shows in the nation, he said.

LaVern Georgson, University of Wisconsin-Extension agriculture agent in Jefferson County, spearheaded the bid to host the show.

Last week, the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors approved supporting and authorizing the county to host the 2019 show, contingent upon finding a suitable host farm.

The Wisconsin Farm Technology Days Inc. board conducted electronic polling of its members to accept the county’s application two days after it was submitted.

“We’ve been working on this for some time and I’m really excited to have the opportunity to host Farm Technology Days for us to showcase our agricultural economy,” said Jim Schroeder, Jefferson County board chairperson.

Formerly known as Farm Progress Days, the show is billed as one of the nation’s largest farm shows and Wisconsin uses it to annually show off its forage and alfalfa production capabilities, said Georgson.

“There are 30-some shows of this kind (nationwide) and each has a unique flavor to it ... Wisconsin’s is different because there are significant field operations; people get to see the machinery working in the field,” Georgson said.

He noted that the show has a \$1.5 million economic impact on the host county, according to a recent University of Wisconsin-River Falls survey, which includes the three years leading up to the event and all the money generated when 40,000 people visit the host farm.

Schroeder and Georgson agreed that the event also provides tremendous opportunities for volunteers and leadership development as the show runs largely on volunteer efforts.

In November, an executive committee will be formed to seek and select a host farm. Then, up to 150 volunteers will be recruited by next summer to begin the work needed to prepare for the tent city that will be set up on 350 acres of farmland.

Civic organizations, churches, nonprofits and youth groups are encouraged to become involved in the food sales, which can boost their fundraising activities, plus the traffic, parking, publicity and other tasks that a farm show requires.

While it might seem to be a daunting task for the host farmer, a suitable farm is selected and Farm Technology Days Inc. staff guides where to plant the demonstration crops, the exhibitors' tent city, parking and other areas.

Georgson said he has received interest from a few farms about the event. Farm Technology Days is looking for at least 350 acres that would be divided into a 70-acre tent city with hundreds of exhibitors, 70 to 80 acres for parking and at least 200 acres for field demonstrations.

In addition to forage harvesting, a wheat harvest also is being planned for the show.

After the event is over, Farm Technology Days will work with the host to put his land back to where it was before the show began, Georgson said.

"One farm could pull this off or one to three farmers could come together and host if their farms are compatible," he said.

The county board plans to budget \$20,000 next year in advance of the event and additional funds in 2018.

Jefferson County last hosted the event in 1984 at the Bernard and Beverly Walter farm in Grellton southwest of Watertown when it was still know as Farm Progress Days.

In 2009, Crave Brothers Farm in the DodgeCounty Town of Portland near Waterloo hosted the show.

Walworth County was Farm Technology Day's host this summer. Attendance reached only 30,000, which Georgson attributed to high temperatures and wet conditions. Next year, the show moves to Kewaunee County, and then Wood County in 2018.

Those interested in participating in Farm Technology Days may contact Georgson at (920) 674-7295.

Show dates for the 2019 event have not been chosen.

Glewen said the executive committee will choose from one of the two middle weeks of July 2019.