

Beet, bean research gets new home

By JENNIFER VINCENT

ABOUT eight years ago, Michigan's sugarbeet and dry bean industries identified the need for expanded research and communication as two key elements in increasing productivity and profitability for growers.

Strides had been made at the existing 120-acre Saginaw Valley Bean and Beet Research Farm, south of Saginaw, but it wasn't really the best fit moving forward, explains Jim Byrum, president of the Michigan Bean Shippers Association.

"The farm is south of Saginaw and difficult to access, which didn't encourage producer involvement we were hoping for," he says. "It also is largely comprised of lake-bottom soils, which are inconsistent with the major dry bean and sugarbeet production areas in the Saginaw Valley and Thumb area."

By identifying a vision and a savings account eight years ago, Michigan State University recently purchased the 250-acre farm of Leroy and Virginia Schluckebier in Frankenmuth to become the new Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center.

The facility is at 9923½ Krueger Road and will replace the old research farm, which was owned by the sugar companies (now the growers) and grower organizations, and leased to MSU as a branch experiment station for 38 years.

Key Points

- MSU buys 250-acre farm for sugarbeet and dry bean research.
- Soils are more compatible with those in major bean and beet growing regions.
- MSU had set aside funds for years until the right property was found.

"The new facility is located near the center of the production region, and we're hoping that will spur a lot more grower activities and grower participation," says Bob Green, executive vice president of the Michigan Bean Commission.

Besides the tillable ground, it includes a house, a shop building, a hip-roof barn, a 30,000-bushel grain handling system, an elevator leg and truck scales.

Planning pays

So how did MSU afford to buy a new research farm and facility in today's economy? Chuck Reid, director of the MSU Land Management Office, says the process started years earlier when "budgets were much better than they are now. We planned for it, and set aside funds until we could find the right property."

Most of the \$1.1 million, Reid says, was earmarked for "project funds" from MSU's Ag Experiment Station's budget.

MSU is hoping to recoup about



Photo by Kurt Steppitz, University Relations

TIME TO DIG IN: Officials gathered April 3 in Frankenmuth to mark the groundbreaking of the new Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center. Celebrating were (from left) Joe Cramer, Star of the West vice president; Tom Coon, MSU Extension director; Charles Bauer, farmer and Michigan Sugar Co. board member; Steve Pueppke, MSU Experiment Station director; Lou Anna Simon, MSU president; Jim Byrum, Michigan Bean Shippers Association president; Mark Flegenheimer, Michigan Sugar Co. president; Bob Green, Michigan Bean Commission executive vice president; and Jack Frank, Michigan Bean Commission member and Research Farm Advisory Board chairman.

\$500,000 of that purchase price in the sale of the old Saginaw Valley Bean and Beet Research Farm, which the owners gifted to the university.

A closed-bid sale, with MSU holding the right to refuse all bids, starts May 1.

With MSU now being the owner of the facility, it will open doors for advanced research and investment.

According to Doug Buhler, MAES associate director, "some research is difficult to do on land you don't control. We manage land to create pests, insects and weeds so that they can be properly evaluated. We conduct cross-experiments and research that is highly regulated."

That will all be possible now, as well new facilities in the future.

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