



Two projects underway in Wisconsin demonstrate the fact that Wisconsin takes its agricultural sector seriously and that communities in the know recognize the present opportunity and economic value of fostering agricultural innovation and entrepreneurship at the regional level.

It's no surprise that Madison continues to drive agricultural innovations in Wisconsin, given that the University of Wisconsin has been the home to Wisconsin's most important agricultural research and development facilities since its Agricultural Department was first established in 1868. Over nearly a century and a half, the UW campus has acted as a magnet for all things agribusiness and as a focal point for complementary businesses and organizations, like the offices of Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection, the State Laboratory of Hygiene, the Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems and, most recently, the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center.

Madison's newest endeavor into the changing agricultural economy involves a four-pronged approach to attracting and promoting cutting edge agribusiness. Grouped collectively under the moniker BioAg Gateway, the proposal combines a \$2.5 million dollar appropriation by Madison's Common Council, in the form of real estate and funding from the city's Community Development Authority, with support from Madison's Economic Development Authority, state and federal grant funds, and private sponsor support. The project seeks to develop a campus to serve as a center for agricultural research, business development, and community education. The Gateway's Midwest Biolink Center and BioAg Business Park would host research and development facilities with adjacent office and conference facilities. The Gateway's Wisconsin Ag Discovery Center and Wisconsin Ag Showcase would feature interactive exhibits linked to an outdoor showcase of cutting edge renewable energy and agricultural technology.

Madison's commitment to fund and support the BioAg Gateway demonstrates a laudable recognition of the rising role of agriculture in the American economy and the importance of pursuing opportunities to attract and support businesses at the forefront of opportunity in the agricultural sector, even in a region where traditional manufacturing still contributes significantly to the economy. But it isn't just the big cities who can take advantage of opportunities to empower the local economy by investing in opportunities in the agricultural sector. In Clark County, with a population of 33,550 people, the City of Owen has committed 71 acres and extension of municipal utilities to the development of the Central Wisconsin Agricultural Innovation Center (CWAIC).

Conceived and promoted by a private organization, the CWAIC proposal would feature a 52,000 square foot LEED certified facility in a business park dedicated to agricultural endeavors. Thanks to the city's grant of rent-free property for the facilities and extension of city services, CWAIC was able to focus its energy on pursuing funding to build its proposed facilities and was recently awarded a \$4 million dollar grant from the federal Economic Development Administration. Clark County, like so many Wisconsin counties, faces a continuing decline in the traditional manufacturing sector made worse by the recent announcement of the shut down of a major aluminum manufacturing plant. The CWAIC proposal recognizes that even as traditional manufacturing jobs are exported or lost to market changes, new opportunities continue to emerge in agriculture and bioenergy, and that communities that fail to act on those opportunities may end up left behind in the changing American economy.

CWAIC still has a lot of work ahead, as it needs to raise another \$5.8 million in matching funds before March, 2011, in order to secure its federal grant award, but the organization enjoys the advantage of support from a local government that is committed to success and provides active financial support in every way it can. When complete, the facility will serve as an incubation and collaboration site for research, education, and business development, and will host an agricultural history museum that will provide the community with a connection between Wisconsin's rich agricultural past and its developing agricultural future. It will serve not only as a business park, but as a destination attraction and an asset to the entire community.

The four counties of northernmost Wisconsin sit in the ideal position to capitalize on new economic opportunities in the agricultural sector. We have the land and intellectual resources to support a center

for agricultural innovation. We have a diverse community of agricultural producers who could benefit from the opportunity to supply raw materials and could serve as a sounding board for the needs of the agricultural community. We can draw upon strong academic resources in Northland College, WITC, and UW Superior.

Like the city of Owen, we are located close enough to a sizable population center to benefit from its economic resources. Perhaps most importantly, we have already seen some indication from local government that it is willing to think toward the future and to provide support resources for projects that lay the groundwork for present development and future prosperity.

As the City of Ashland contemplates development of the proposed Lake Superior Technology Park, let us also consider the importance of agriculture to our region and commit to funding the resources that will build on our agricultural history and ensure its importance and economic viability into the future. A center for agricultural services and technology development could serve as an enhancement to the existing agricultural sector in northern Wisconsin, as a perfect complement to a technology park, and as an icon to the rest of the state that establishes our region as a legitimate and desirable place to do business. Accomplishing that goal will require a commitment by local governments to provide an organization with the resources and financial freedom to pursue its mission as effectively as CWAIC has been able in Clark County.

As we break ground for our future, let us make sure not just to plant seeds of hope, but to take stock of the forecast and plant seeds that will thrive with the changing seasons. Agriculture remains integral to Wisconsin's economy and culture. Now is the time to embrace opportunity through action to ensure that the future of agriculture in northern Wisconsin remains a future marked for success.