

## Proposed agribusiness center will celebrate what Clark County knows best

by Ann Knoedler

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Here's an interesting statistic: [Clark County, Wis.](#) has a population of 33,550 people, compared to 63,000 cows. So it comes as no surprise that it is the leading dairy county in the state; plus it ranks in the top five in the production of oats and barley.

Sounds like an ideal location to build an Agribusiness Innovation Center.

The plan is to build a 52,000-square-foot, three-story, LEED-certified multipurpose Ag-Tech building in a business park that will be devoted to agriculture. The [Central Wisconsin Agribusiness Innovation Center](#) will be located along [Highway 29](#) in the [city of Owen](#).

CWAIC, a private corporation, was formed to promote the project and raise funds. They are partnering with the city of Owen, who in turn will extend sewer, water and roads to the site. [The Samuels Group](#) from Wausau is the design/build firm.

The overall vision and purpose of the project is to celebrate farming practices of the past with historical displays and a museum area, and to keep the future strong for family farming and all aspects of agriculture by providing a centralized facility where education, research/development, and bioenergy innovations can collaborate.

When incubator businesses are ready to expand, there will be a place for them to build in the same business park.

The estimated cost is \$9.8 million. But there is some good funding news for the project. Last September, CWAIC received word that they are eligible to receive a \$4 million grant from the [U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration](#).

[CWAIC](#) must now match the grant and raise the remaining \$5.8 million from private donations. This doesn't give them much time. The grant award will be withdrawn if construction doesn't start by March 8, 2011, and finish by Dec. 8, 2012.

This is an ambitious project. But if it succeeds, the benefits will reach far beyond Clark County, even for urban dwellers who have never set foot on a farm or in a cow pie.

Those farmsteads dotting Wisconsin are more than just a pretty face on the landscape. Besides the obvious (keeping us well-fed), just think what could happen when all these great minds come together at CWAIC to come up with the next great source of cleaner, cheaper fuel.



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