

# Tennessee Facility Expansion

*Producers Will Reap ‘Value Added’ Enhancements Through UT-Martin Expansion*

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USDA Rural Development State Director Ruth Tackett and Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Ken Givens joined University of Tennessee at Martin Chancellor Tom Rakes and other state and local officials recently to review the completion of Phase I and announce Phase II of the expansion of the Ray and Wilma Smith Livestock Merchandising Facility on the UT Martin campus.

“The bottom line is this facility will increase the value to the producers of our region in a lot of different ways,” said Dr. Jerry Gresham, Chair of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

He added the facility has been a dream for many years and that dream started to take shape in 2003.

“The first thing that happened, Mr. and Mrs. Smith were here one day and she was impressed by some Belted Galaway cattle,” he explained. “As the conversations proceeded, we shared with them some business and things we’d like to happen and they were willing to anti up some money for a private gift which was then used as leverage for matching money from the USDA Rural Development. Those two projects came together in 2003 and resulted in completion of the Phase I project.” The funding allowed for the restoration of an old dairy calf feeding barn which was reconstructed on the old concrete floor.

The current Phase II project is a result of Rural Development chipping in \$55,000, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture adding \$127,400, and \$17,600 from local contributors. The funding allowed for the restoration of an old dairy calf feeding barn which was reconstructed on the old concrete floor. The expansion project will provide additional exhibition and stalling areas to permit hosting larger and more diversified livestock events.

“Since 2003, we have been able to host numerous sales events,” Gresham continued. Included are the West Tennessee Angus Sale which sold cattle to multiple states in the Southeast; an annual commercial heifer sale which is a collaborative effort between UTM and the Tennessee Livestock Producers (TLP); a show steer sale, and various other purebred cattle sales. The cattle sales held in the past have been a very effective means of marketing cattle by smaller producers who are incapable of hosting their own individual sales due to financial constraints.

“Some large producers have facilities, but the smaller producers don’t have the facilities to do this,” Gresham said. “The average herd size is about 24 head. So this really appeals to a lot of small producers.”

In addition to cattle sales, the facility has been utilized for various niche markets as well. An annual show lamb sale which markets in excess of 50 lambs from consigners in Tennessee and Kentucky is held at the facility each year. Last year alone, lambs were sold to four states. A lamb from the 2007 sale actually was named the grand champion market lamb at the Tennessee State Fair.

Youth and 4H programs are also conducted in the facility. There’s also a BLM wild horse sale.

The facility is much more than a merchandising center. Numerous adult education programs such as Beef Quality Assurance Trainings were conducted here by extension personnel. Also held were artificial insemination clinics, bull breeding soundness evaluations, and agricultural education teacher workshops. Youth events including livestock judging camps, cattle fitting and showing camps have been held. Since the inception of Governor’s School, this facility has been a key

resource for providing a hands-on educational experience for academically gifted high school students in Tennessee that are interested in agriculture.

“Without question, the facility has served as a location where livestock producers with multiple species can come together and effectively merchandise their animals across the Southeastern United States,” he added.

Gresham gave a brief overview of Phase II of the expansion project.

“We need to expand this facility,” he said. “When we have sales we end up renting tents to house the livestock. We are also upgrading the technology in the sales arena by installing new monitors and we will have a set of registered commercial livestock scales.”

Phase II includes adding another wing to the building, extending it to the east. Pie-shaped pens will be constructed in the pasture.

“The key additions in this particular project is we also will add a set of certified sales,” Gresham continued. “What certified sales will do is permit us to work with extension and other groups and maybe serve as a collection point for merchandising livestock for producers in the area. We have a lot of small producers in the area. It’s difficult for someone with 20, 25, 30 head of cattle to assemble a uniform group effectively.

“We want to set up a collection point for small producers throughout the region who can bring their livestock in, group them, weigh them in, merchandise them, hold video conferences or video sales,” he said. “A lot of different technologies are out there to do this. Then they can be grouped into trailer lots so they can sell them.”

He said Phase III would be to add a larger sale ring so people can be better seated.

“Normally, there are 350 people in that ring, and that’s a lot of people in one place,” he said.

Gresham introduced Chancellor Tom Rakes who spoke briefly.

“Our agriculture and natural resource faculty lauds a lot of professionals on this campus,” he began. “This is essential to what we do and it really enables us to do a better job. I need to mention the faculty in that department includes Dr. Matt Spangler who put the grant together and worked with the state and the USDA. Things don’t just happen automatically.

“The Ray and Wilma Smith Livestock Merchandising Facility provides something that we don’t have in this area and for us to be able to bring our students here and see what it’s really like and to expand it now gives us an opportunity for our students to see it first hand, to experience it and then be prepared better for what’s happening. The location brings the community right into our learning facility.”

USDA Rural Development State Director Ruth Tackett noted that it’s a tough time now in farming and agriculture.

“Whenever Rural Development can invest in our small communities to build something that will outlive all of us and will help our rural communities grow, that’s what we want to do,” she said. “I think this is an example of that. We are challenged as any organization is. We get more requests than we ever have dollars. So it’s a hard choice sometimes when we have to decide what project gets funded and what project does not. That is hard, but I am proud to say that I think this project is one that’s going to outlive all of us and I am especially proud of it as I’m sure you are, Mr. and Mrs. Smith.”

She added she is honored to be present, and she thinks this is a good use of the grant dollars.

“I look forward to coming back many years from now to see what additional work has been done on this. I always like to tell people it’s important that you leave a legacy. You want to leave a good legacy and you want to leave a place better than you found it when you first came in so I am especially proud that is what UTM is also doing.” Δ



**Ruth Tackett, USDA Rural Development State Director**



**Tom Rakes, University of Tennessee at Martin Chancellor**



**Dr. Jerry Gresham, Chair of the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources**



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