

We Are All in this Together

By John Philpott

TML Director of Special Projects

Will Rogers once said, "If you want to be successful, it's just this simple. Know what you are doing. Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing."

The city and county officials of the Texas Panhandle are doing just that, and the result is the economic success currently taking place all over the "High Ground of Texas." They have milk, they have oil, they have wind, they have cattle, and they have sorghum and corn—all of which have a tremendous impact on what is happening in the Texas Panhandle.

Recycling has become a national endeavor, and the High Ground of Texas is taking it seriously by making maximum use of renewable energy sources. With ethanol and wind projects taking place around the region, cities like Sweetwater, White Deer, Amarillo, Big Spring, Hereford, Dumas, Stratford, Muleshoe, Levelland, Plainview, Childress, and others are getting involved in projects that take advantage of the natural resources abundant in the South Plains region.

Construction of the Levelland ethanol project, which was developed by a local grain cooperative as a new market for locally grown sorghum, will begin in the next few weeks. Although it is unlikely that local growers will ever supply all the grain the 40-million-gallon plant will use, they will benefit from another sorghum market for the farmers on the plains. The plant will bring additional jobs to the area and will use treated effluent from the City of Levelland wastewater facility for the majority of its water needs.



Rick Osburn, city manager of the City of Levelland, said, "The co-op worked very hard to keep as much local ownership in the plant as possible. Almost 50 percent of the ownership of the plant is from Hockley County. Since Hockley County is one of the top petroleum producing counties in Texas, this diversification into renewable fuels is a natural."

In late August, it was announced that a 100-million-gallon-per-year ethanol plant will be built in Sherman County near Stratford, Texas. That facility will refine 40 million bushels of corn and sorghum annually into a clean-burning, renewable fuel. The

Sherman plant will generate the steam used in ethanol manufacturing by using more than one billion pounds of cattle manure a year. Once complete, it will be one of the most fuel-efficient ethanol refineries in the nation and will be equal in size to the facility at Hereford, which is currently the largest biomass-fueled ethanol plant in the United States.

The news release in August quoted Kathy Allen, executive director of the Sherman County Development Committee, as saying, "This facility will be an economic boon to the area. It will create an estimated 61 skilled jobs and 77 additional support jobs. All together, the construction and ongoing opera-

tion of the plant is expected to infuse more than \$220 million into the area's economy over the next ten years."

To help supply the fuel source for the biomass ethanol plants, there are now 60 dairies in the region producing over 220 million pounds of milk per month. "The Panhandle and the South Plains regions continue to take advantage of the agriculture-base economies with the influx of the dairies and their by-products. The cities of Hereford, Muleshoe, Dalhart, Dumas, Pampa, Littlefield, Brownfield, Friona, Plainview, Spearman, and many others in the Panhandle continue to benefit from the dairy production. Service-related industries, packaging, and value-added processing have followed right behind," according to Lorie Vincent, executive director of the High Ground of Texas.

The city manager of the City of Friona, Terri Johnson, stated, "Economic growth is on an up-swing here in Friona due to the growth of

both the dairy and beef sectors of business. We are seeing an increase in new home building and increased activity in the real estate markets. The retail sector and allied industries have seen nice growth due to the influx of these new businesses. We feel that, for the City of Friona and the surrounding area, we are just at the beginning of this growth stage."

Ed Hansen, city manager, City of Spearman, acknowledged, "The addition of the dairies and wind farms has brought an increase in the valuation of property in the county and surrounding area. It has also brought into the region new families and jobs, which helps all aspects of a small rural community. There are additional children in the schools, more customers for our local businesses, and the city sales tax receipts are up 14 percent this year."

With the presence of the dairies, the City of Dalhart will benefit greatly from the construction of a new \$300-million, state-of-the-art cheese factory that is projected to employ more than

350 workers and produce one million pounds of cheese per day when fully operational.

In addition to the dairies, the wind generation projects, and the ethanol plants, the petroleum industry has turned around this past year, and many of the High Ground cities, like Perryton and Wheeler, are feeling the growth. Many new initiatives in the oil and gas industry, as well as research into nuclear power, are of great interest to the cities, counties, and educational institutions in the region.

All these economic development projects bring to mind two other quotes by the famous Will Rogers: "You've got to go out on a limb sometimes because that's where the fruit is," and "America is the land of opportunity and don't ever forget it."

The cities and counties of the High Ground of Texas working together have demonstrated the truth in the philosopher's wisdom. It is an exciting time in the Panhandle! ★



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