

Russell Brent High

Dairy lab now closer to reality

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DIMMITT - A big step in making Castro County the center of the booming dairy industry occurred Friday when city, county and state officials broke ground on the new Pioneer Dairy Lab Inc.

"This is a vital brick in the foundation of a new industry in this region," said U.S. Rep. Charlie Stenholm, D-Stamford, at ceremonies conducted along with Dimmitt's July Jubilee celebration.

Stenholm said the nation is looking at the region to relocate the dairy industry and, as the dairies grow, the infrastructure comes with it.

The new dairy lab plays a vital role in that movement, because all milk must be tested for safety and quality from the truck to the milk carton, he said.

Stenholm said other industry components soon could be looking at this area - perhaps for a cheese plant or a powder plant.

U.S. Rep. Randy Neugebauer, R-Lubbock, said the dairies bring diversity, year-round employment and attract other businesses.

While other areas have environmental problems with dairies, this region is a natural fit and already is adapted to the livestock industry, he said.

Neugebauer said Pioneer Dairy Lab will give young people from the region a chance to stay and raise their children here.

Mayor Wayne Collins said city officials worked for a year to get Pioneer Dairy Lab owners Andy and Jeri Brand to build in Dimmitt.

He said the city gave the Brands 7.5 acres of land, a 75 percent tax abatement for five years and free hookup for water, electricity, gas, telephone and high-speed Internet.

In return, the Economic Development Corp. contract requires Pioneer Dairy Lab to create 25 jobs, Collins said.

The company also is expected to make a capital investment of about \$3 million.

"We think this will make us the center of the developing dairy industry for the next decade," Collins said, adding the city eventually would like to get a cheese plant, possibly within five or six years.

Pioneer Dairy Lab is headquartered in Artesia, N.M. The Brands also operate labs in Stephenville and Clovis, N.M.

Andy Brand said the Dimmitt lab will be the largest of the four when it is brought online in January. It will be 9,000 square feet and start with 10 to 20 employees and possibly grow to 40, he said.

Brent High will be the new manager, and Brand said he will bring at least three employees from the other labs to get the Dimmitt lab running.

Every dairy is required to have its milk tested for butter fat and protein to help determine its milk's value. The milk also is tested once a week for bacteria to fulfill state requirements, Brand said.

The company tests 120,000 samples of milk a month.

The lab not only will serve area dairies, but also this half of the United States, Brand said.

He said he receives FedEx samples six days a week from most every dairy region in the nation.

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