

Dawson County challenged to attract industry

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Wednesday, 06 October 2010 17:56 - Last Updated Wednesday, 06 October 2010 17:58



Consultant calls Monsanto county's best marketing tool.

Opportunities to grow Dawson County are out there so residents shouldn't be complacent.

"You better not sit and wait for them," John Rhodes told about 40 people at Cozad's Chipper Hall. "You'd better go out and get them."

Rhodes is a site selection and economic development consultant for MS&B which developed an economic development assessment of the county. He presented his findings Sept. 29.

Dawson Area Development commissioned the study after learning the Tenneco manufacturing plant in Cozad planned to close its doors.

Rhodes described the Monsanto Water Utilization Learning Center south of Gothenburg as perhaps the best marketing tool in the county because it brings in people from around the world who are interested and involved in agriculture.

The uses of agricultural-related products are in the process of taking some very new directions that apply toward energy—materials, nutraceuticals as well as medicinal and other derivatives.

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Nutraceuticals are described as food containing health-giving additives and have medicinal benefit.

Rhodes pointed out that corn is now used in polymers and industrial solvents while soy can be changed into adhesives and foam.

Beef derivatives come from a variety of beef organs and fluids for medical applications while alfalfa is used in nutrition supplements and lutein which is utilized to inhibit a form of blindness.

“The days of agriculture are going to change dramatically,” Rhodes said.

Challenges the county faces when recruiting new companies or industries, he said, include:

Its size of 25,000 residents with a flat growth rate.

Four-year higher education attainment levels are low which is reflective of agricultural/industrial communities.

Lack of a significant community college presence indicates potential lack of trained talent which is why county leaders need to emphasize strong on-site training capabilities.

Given the county’s demographics and existing businesses, Rhodes suggested looking at recruitment of process-related manufacturing such as making derivatives from regional agricultural products.

Industry could also produce parts and equipment such as for power generation and farm and

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transportation (aircraft, motor vehicles).

Without any significant warehouses or distribution centers in the county, Rhodes said competing for them is an opportunity.

With access to a major telecom corridor, water for cooling and reasonable power rates, he said data centers in the area might also make a prospective site list.

Leveraging Monsanto's research and development for water utilization could bring about derivative opportunities for different drought-tolerant grasses and ornamental trees and shrubs as well as seed crops for hybrid species.

Rhodes encouraged the county to establish a certified site programs which makes sites "shovel ready" for business and industry.

The consulting company assessed available building sites in Gothenburg, Cozad and Lexington and suggested potential uses.

An estimated 11 acres in the Gothenburg Improvement Company's Fourth Street addition could be used for manufacturing.

A 156-acre site, east of Frito-Lay and once proposed for an ethanol plant, offers both manufacturing and warehousing opportunities, he said.

For the Tenneco building, Rhodes suggested several uses including

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