Celebration Scheduled for Future Agricultural Land Preservation Center

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A multi-generational agricultural family in Salt Lake County plans to donate 100 acres to Utah State University Extension for the creation of a center dedicated to agricultural land preservation. The Bastian Agricultural Center will provide demonstrations and education with a goal of increasing agricultural literacy. The center will be located in unincorporated Salt Lake County.

Ken White, USU Extension vice president, said the impact of the generous land donation will be felt for many generations and will provide an opportunity for people to fully understand where their food comes from. He said the center will be based on four components: natural resources; small-farm education as it relates to food; small-farm education as it relates to animal production; and science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The center will help serve the educational needs of all ages, but especially the growing, younger population.

“The programs and facilities at the future Bastian Agricultural Center will be remarkable, and our goal is to have hands-on, applied learning,” White said. “Our hope is that this facility will provide education, experiences and a sense of community for those who visit.”

Plans for the center include orchards and dry-farm demonstration plots, an amphitheater, a wetland discovery center, livestock activities, classroom/workshop space and open spaces for ag demonstrations and research, to name a few. It also will include a makerspace community work space with a variety of tools, laser cutter, 3-D printer, sewing machines, hand tools and more. It is planned that the center will be a long-term project, with the facilities built in phases.

A free community celebration for the creation of the new center will be Saturday, June 22, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Bastian Elementary, 5692 W. Big Bend Park Drive, in Herriman. The celebration will provide a sneak peak of the activities that will be held at the center and is intended for families and anyone interested in learning what the center will offer in the future. Participants will be able to make fresh salsa with a blender bike, see an underwater remote-operated vehicle, fly a drone, see livestock, mountain bike on a course, try out the climbing wall and more. Free Aggie ice cream will be given to the first 500 people in attendance. The celebration will highlight the four components of the center.

“I’m especially excited about the STEM component,” said Dave Francis, director for USU Extension youth development. “Farmers and ranchers, including the land donors for this center, were some of our earliest innovators. If they had a challenge, they had to figure out a way to solve it, whether it was with a new tool or a new procedure. Today our farmers and ranchers often have one foot in the field and one on the silicone slopes. To feed 8 billion people, we have to use technology.”

Francis said the makerspace at the facility will provide youth with the tools they need to create and innovate.

“They may want to find a better way to weed or save water, and they can go to the makerspace and explore and find a way to help solve their problem,” he said. “This, and all aspects of the center, will provide applied learning in all senses.”

According to family representative Jake Anderson, the Bastian family is donating the land to preserve their heritage of farming in the Salt Lake Valley.

“Being a successful farmer requires determination, hard work, courage and a great love of the land,” he said. “It also requires being a creator, an entrepreneur and a scientist. These are all qualities that the Bastian family wished to pass on for generations to come through the creation of the Bastian Agricultural Center.”

Further information about the four components of the center are listed below:

STEM Center
The STEM Center component will consist of a conference center, lodging, pavilions and a sports/activity area. Utah 4-H reaches approximately 73,680 youth each year, with over 8,000 volunteers. Currently, the 4-H program in Utah reaches 58% of youth in an urban setting and 42% in a rural setting. The center will provide a more central location for 4-H youth and volunteers to gather for conferences, state contests and other 4-H-related activities. The center will also be a venue for community partners to hold conferences, team building and other group activities.

Natural Resources

The natural resources component will consist of a resource education center, amphitheater, wetland/ponds discovery and youth activities. In today’s society, children, youth and adults are experiencing less time engaging in nature. In Richard Louv’s book, “The Last Child in the Woods,” he defines this lack of relationship as nature-deficit disorder. Between 1997 and 2003, there was a 50% decline in the number of children between ages 9 and 12 who spent time participating in outdoor activities such as hiking, walking, fishing and gardening (Hofferth & Sandberg 2001). The Natural Resources Center will help to bridge this gap by providing education about the value of nature to youth and the broader community.

Small Farm Education-Food Production

The small farm education-food production component will consist of an area for a farmers market, classroom/workshop space, greenhouses, demonstration gardens, orchards and dry farm demonstration plots. USU Extension offers a program designed to assist thousands of Utah families each year in making healthy food choices, as well as Food $ense, which serves individuals who are food insecure or at risk. This component of the Bastian Agricultural Center will provide a venue in Salt Lake County to house such programs and food demonstrations. Participants will gain an understanding and hands-on learning experience of where their food comes from, how to grow their food and how to preserve and cook it.

Small Farm Education-Animal Production

The small-farm education-animal production component will bring agricultural education and experiences to an increasing urban population. Last year, over 24,000 youth participated in 4-H livestock projects and had the opportunity to develop leadership, citizenship, self-esteem, social and livestock skills. This part of the center will provide an avenue for more youth from the urban population to experience animal production activities.