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University plans dairy research facility

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Elora-based centre will investigate sustainable animal agriculture systems
by KAREN BRIGGS

Dairy cattle will be the focus of a new livestock research centre to be constructed at the current site of the Elora Research Station in Elora, Ontario.

The Research and Innovation Centre, Dairy Phase, will be the first phase of an extensive new facility being planned by the University of Guelph, the provincial government, and the Ontario dairy industry.

Future phases may include research facilities for swine, poultry, and beef, as well as farming-related environmental and energy research.

Rich Moccia, the university's associate vice-president (strategic partnerships), explains the project was sparked about 10 years ago when the Canadian Council on Animal Care identified some deficiencies in the existing dairy research facility in Elora, which was built in the 1960s. "The animals we're dealing with today are very different than the ones which existed when the old facility was built," he says.

The new facility will use the existing infrastructure at the Elora Research Station but will be about 50 per cent larger, totalling about 150,000 square feet. It will include animal holdings, laboratories and research facilities, offices, and equipment storage and will house a milking herd of 230 to 240 animals and an equivalent amount of replacement animals such as dry heifers.

"We expect to have shovels in the ground by this fall, and if all goes well, we should be operational by mid-2013," Moccia says.

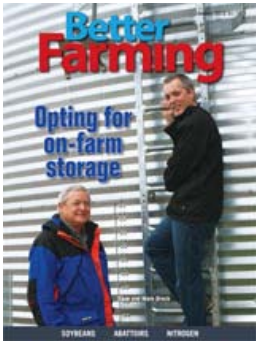
Among the unique features of the new complex will be a metabolic research wing which will allow researchers to very precisely look at feed and waste output in dairy cattle.

The concept design for the facility is now complete and tenders are being sought for its construction. A maximum budget of \$25 million has been set, but Moccia says he hopes the project will come in under that amount.

"The dairy research facility is being rolled out first, both because there is a critical need and because the dairy industry was able to come forward with funding to help make it happen," he says.

The province is providing 80 per cent of the project's funding and industry will supply the remainder. "This collaboration is the real success story," Moccia says. "It is the first of its kind in Ontario, and is going to put us on the world map." **BF**

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