Wilson County Agricultural Article from Ruth Correll, Agricultural Extension Agent

James E. Ward Ag. Center – Result of a Need and a Vision

The James E. Ward Ag. Center was born out of a need. In 1973 a group of Wilson County citizens were concerned about the future of Wilson County 4-H livestock shows and 4-H youth events. The fairgrounds on Coles Ferry Pike was being sold and soon there would be no place for fairs, cattle shows and other events for the county’s youth and citizens. This group saw a need and had a vision. This group included Charles Moss, Melvin Arnett, Johnny Moss, Dan Smith, Ray Smith, Johnny Trice, Ralph McKee and others. Most of that group are now deceased but their vision lives on.

They had challenges to overcome. One was finding a piece of property and the other was financing that property. All they were looking to purchase was 10 acres. The group learned of a property on Sparta Pike which was for sale. The Baddour estate was approximately 104 acres and the group was told by then Mayor Bill Baird, they could purchase 10 acres or all 104 acres. They had located a property but now had to find the funds to purchase the property.

The group then met with members of the County Court to gain support for purchasing the needed 10 acres. When the County Court met in March, 1974, then court member, Bob Burton made the motion to purchase the entire 104 acre tract of the Baddour Estate. The motion was seconded by Nathan Hankins and passed unanimously by the County Court. This was the birth of the James E. Ward Ag. Center. The County Court saw and joined in the vision for potential for that property to serve the citizens of Wilson County.

The center was dedicated as the James E. Ward Agriculture and Community Center in July, 1976. Mr. Ward, had served as county agent in Wilson County since 1936 and he was recognized as one of Tennessee’s outstanding extension agents in production agriculture and leadership.

Wilson County has long had great ties to the land and agriculture. The county’s reputation as an agricultural center was built on having one of the oldest continuous livestock market’s in the state, at one time a bi-weekly mule sale that was only exceeded by a sale in Atlanta, a premier lamb and sheep sale and premiere cattle shows and sales.

Today, the James E. Ward Agriculture and Community Center has grown to a 270 acre multi-event center and is used for a wide range of activities to include, family reunions, state and national camping events, the annual Festival of Lights, state and national antique car shows, the historical Fiddler’s Grove Village, the Wilson County Fair, the Country Living Fair, state antique tractor shows and many agricultural events to include, Tennessee Beef Agribition, horse shows, the TN State Saddle Club show, local, state, regional and national cattle shows, dairy shows and sales, goat shows, sheep shows, Wilson County 4-H events and many other events. It is a multi-event center but still maintains its agricultural heritage. These many events draw thousands of folks to our county and community where they
stay in Wilson County hotels, eat at Wilson County restaurants, shop in Wilson County stores, purchase gas at Wilson County convenience stores and have a positive impact on our tax revenues.

I frequently travel throughout our state and nationally for Extension related events and when I mention Wilson County and the James E. Ward Ag. Center, it is amazing how many people have visited this center sometime in their travel and all remark what an awesome facility.

Wilson County continues to grow and now there is a new need for a large multi-event facility at the James E. Ward Ag. Center. There is a need and a demand for a facility to accommodate large group meetings, high school graduations, trade shows, industry conventions, and many other events. The Ag Center Management Committee and the County Commission have again stepped up to join the vision. The County Commission has approved the funding of a new Expo Center to be built on the property. This vision will be a source of pride in the future for this Ag. Center Management Committee and the County Commission. It will benefit all the citizens of Wilson County with increased tax revenue generated by the all the events to be held at the center. It will serve the entire Wilson County community as a premiere event center. Wilson County will certainly be “The Place to Be.”

The mission of Extension is about community economic development and Improvement. This new addition will definitely be a win, win addition for the James E. Ward Ag. Center and for the citizens of Wilson County. I will continue to promote the James E. Ward Agriculture and Community Center wherever I go.

For additional information on these and other topics, contact the UT Extension Office, 925 East Baddour Parkway, Lebanon, TN 37087, 615-444-9584 or acorrell@utk.edu. UT Extension pro-vides equal oppor-tunities in all programs. Visit the UT/TSU Extension webpage at http://utextension.tennessee.edu/wilson or look for UT & TSU Extension, Wilson County on Facebook.

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Submitted by:  
Ruth Correll  
Agricultural Agent  
UT/TSU Extension, Wilson County  
acorrell@utk.edu