

Relocated Saginaw Valley Research Farm Expands Research in Thumb

To expand research opportunities and improve grower access to research results, the AgBioResearch (ABR) relocated and renamed its field research station in the Saginaw Valley.

The 250-acre Saginaw Valley Research and Extension Center opened April 3, 2009 at 9923 1/2 Krueger Rd., 4 miles north of Frankenmuth. It replaced the 120-acre Saginaw Valley Bean and Beet Research Farm in Saginaw.

"We needed more land to expand our mission and to more fully meet the needs of an important agricultural region in Michigan," said Doug Buhler, ABR associate director. "We're also looking forward to developing more of a focal point for ABR, MSU Extension and MSU programs in the Saginaw Valley/Frankenmuth area with this new location."

Most of the state's dry bean and sugar beet production is located in the Saginaw Valley and Thumb area. Michigan is the country's leading producer of black beans and the No. 2 producer of dry beans, an industry that added more than \$104 million to the state's economy in 2007. The state is also the country's No. 4 producer of sugar beets, with a \$124 million production value in 2007.

"Michigan's climate, soil profile and growing season vary dramatically from north to south and east to west, so the geographic location of ABR field stations are critical to providing accurate, economically relevant information to growers," explained Jim Kelly, faculty coordinator for the Saginaw Valley field research station. "Although very uniform, the soil types at the former farm were only representative of about 5 percent of the soils in the region. The new farm better represents the soil type and weather variables of the area, which is important because the climate can change every 10 miles due to lake effect."

The new research farm also is located in an area close to where the state's major cash crops -- beets, beans, corn, wheat and soybeans -- are grown.

"The previous site was a little out of the mainstream since it was on the west side of Saginaw -- it was a less convenient for farmers to visit," Kelly said. "Farmers like to see results from an area that's adjacent to their own because they get a sense that the research conducted at the farm relates better to their operations."

"We've created a great opportunity for bean growers and processors in Michigan to have a strong basis for research," said Bob Green, executive director of the Michigan Bean Commission. "There is close collaboration between MSU scientists and industry researchers at the facility. It brings everyone together so anything new and leading edge gets transferred to the industry fairly quickly."

"There's been extensive research performed at the old Saginaw Valley Beet and Bean Research Farm that has helped advance the dry bean and sugar beet industries in Michigan," said Ray VanDriessche, director of community and government relations for the Michigan Sugar Co. "The cooperative working relationship between MSU and these groups has produced research that has allowed Michigan growers to be national leaders in a variety of commodities and the new farm will allow us to strengthen that leadership. There will also be an opportunity to conduct research on other rotational crops like corn, wheat and soybeans. These are crops we already have in rotation with sugar beets and dry beans, so it makes for a very good fit."

The former research farm, which is owned by dry bean and sugar beet groups, is being donated to MSU to sell.

"The money will be used to help pay for the cost of the new land, facility construction and infrastructure improvements," said Chuck Reid, director of the MSU Land Management Office. "We are extremely grateful for this generous investment in the new farm to help ensure its success and a sustainable future for Michigan agriculture."