

## Friends of Agriculture Focus

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Friends of Agriculture, a non-profit, tax-exempt organization was incorporated to raise funds to build, support and maintain the facility for all our citizens. We are supported by the community as well as business, health officials, and professionals who are willing to apply for grants and seek private funding.

The Business Plan focuses on the *needs* of our community including economic development, health and nutrition, quality of life, education, large gathering/meeting space and emergency shelter.

- a. **Economic Development:** The feasibility study from the University of Georgia clearly stated the economic impact on our county would be substantial at nearly \$735,000. Even without the study, it is clear to those who attend events at other county agricultural centers ~ there is a substantial positive effect on their community. Speaking with commissioners and other leaders, their agricultural centers are 100% utilized by the community and outside organizations bringing substantial revenues into their accounts. We are losing money that could be coming to Polk County.
- b. **Health and Nutrition:** Central Polk County, where the center will be built, is considered a food desert by the USDA. As stated in the business plan and supported by local farmers markets and health experts, the large commercial kitchen used to teach cooking and nutrition classes plus the cannery will help those who need these services the most. The planned community gardens and indoor farmers markets further enhance these benefits.
- c. **Quality of Life:** Our rural areas have few activities or facilities to support quality of life issues. Those who live in the county may not have the means to get to recreational and sporting events available in Cedartown, Rockmart and Aragon. The centrally located Agriculture Education & Natural Resource Center would meet these needs by providing programs designed to fulfill quality of life activities for both our young and older population.
- d. **Education:** Currently there are no programs or a facility to meet the needs of adults interested in continuing their education to keep up with the ever-changing requirements in agriculture. Our citizens must travel to other counties to get *required* training to meet state and federal regulations. Most people still look at farmers as the old guy on a tractor, but today the top paying jobs in agriculture do not reflect this image. Our home-schooled children, among others, will have access to prepare for high-paying careers in agriculture-based science, mathematics, engineering, pharmaceuticals, research, mechanical; safety, USDA inspectors, transportation and many more not being filled due to lack of qualified applicants. An educated workforce will bring much needed jobs to Polk County.
- e. **Meeting Space:** Our County is lacking a large indoor meeting and gathering space. Events such as trade shows, business conventions and meetings, job fairs, concerts, agricultural shows, etc. will be available to our citizens. Planned seating of 400 – 600 would greatly expand accessibility and provide financial support. Other counties are benefiting from our lack of foresight as these profitable opportunities go elsewhere.
- f. **Emergency Services:** The need for an easily accessible centrally located emergency center during severe weather events has become critically evident in past years. The proposed facility with its commercial kitchen, dressing rooms, bathrooms, large open space, and smaller classrooms would meet these needs after such events and provide a safe haven before and during dangerous conditions. The covered livestock area can also be used by emergency services as a central staging area.