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2009 Wisconsin Farm Technology Days a success

WATERLOO - "We exceeded our goal of getting 80,000 people to our show, which is one of the highest attended shows in recent years," said Dave Frohling, chairman of the Dodge County Wisconsin Farm Technology Days that ran Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at the Crave Brothers Farm at Waterloo.

Frohling said it was gratifying to see all these volunteers come together and pitch in to get the job done. He said people worked together so well and committees worked as a team, always helping out where needed to make the show the best it could be.

"Its obvious people take pride in agriculture and their community," he said.

Bill Nass, co-chair of the executive committee that has been planning the show for more than three years, said, "After all the hard work all these years, it's very gratifying to have a successful Farm Technology Days. From what we've heard from exhibitors and visitors, people are very pleased with the show which makes all the work worthwhile."

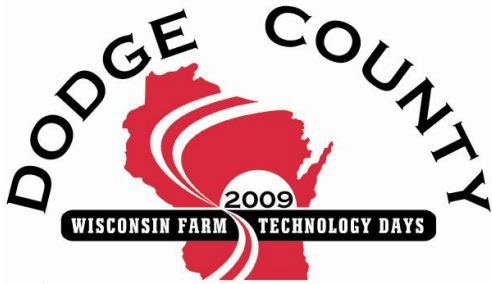
Matt Hanson, Dodge County crops and soils extension agent, who served as executive secretary for the show, said, "Our goal was not necessarily high numbers but our goal was to make the exhibitors happy and educate people about where their food comes from and about modern agriculture. For farmers, it was a place to see so many agricultural products in the same place and to learn from the university specialists about so many things."

The Crave brothers, hosts of the event, were equally pleased with the attendance and with how smoothly things went at the show, despite some rain showers that kept the grounds crew busy spreading wood chips to dry out wet areas. Light rain on the first day of the show and throughout the evening resulted in a two-hour delay on Wednesday, but despite the delay, the biggest attendance was on Wednesday when more than 28,000 attended the show that also closed an hour later. Tuesday's attendance came in at more than 26,000 and Thursdays was about 24,000.

Anna Maener, exhibitor coordinator, says that's pretty typical for shows although they know the numbers were up at this year's show because of the amount of food that was sold each day at the show. Food stand organizers had to order extra food to carry them through the three-day event. The "Crave burger" was a popular attraction, they said.

Attendance numbers are still preliminary, but one thing is for sure. More visitors had an opportunity to tour the farm than at any other show. Over the three days, more than 30,000 people took tram rides or bus tours through the farm, including driving right through the center of one of the freestall barns where some of the Crave cows are housed. They also stopped outside the on-farm cheese factory and the anaerobic digester.

Dan Nemke of Clear Horizons, who helped conduct the special digester tours, said at least 5,000 people got to go through that specialized tour. He said, "Many people don't understand how a digester works. This show provided the opportunity for 35,000 people to learn more about it."



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Ron Schuler, UW-Extension coordinator of field demonstrations, said things went well considering the challenges with the weather. "There were still mower conditioner, merger, and chopping demonstrations and a little bit of wheat was combined the first day," he said. "We still did tillage, manure application demonstrations, and ride and drive. Farmers understand that field demonstrations are dependent on weather. They deal with weather all the time with their own field work."

Schuler will move into the position as Wisconsin Farm Technology Days general manager after this show with his first official show taking place in Pierce County next year. He replaces retiring Glenn Thompson. Thompson admits the last day of this year's show was an emotional one for him. He says, "I've come to know so many people through the last 18 years doing this. I work with all the volunteers in all the counties hosting the show and with all the host families in each county each year. It's been a wonderful experience."

The Crave brothers, Charles, Tom, George and Mark, and their wives and families enjoyed the opportunity to host the show and were pleased that so many people came from around the country and even from other countries to see their farm and attend the show.

Meanwhile their employees kept the cows milked and performed the routine duties around the farm. Pete Stilling, a five-year employee at the farm, was busy caring for some cattle in one of the barns while the tours passed through. He says, "We put in some extra time before the show to get everything done but the Craves want their employees to keep regular working hours and have time off, too."

While he sometimes works weekends because he works with the livestock, he said family is important to the Craves, and they want their employees to also have time for their families and their own lives.

Wisconsin Farm Technology Days is the largest outdoor farm show in the state and would not be possible without the dedicated services of hundreds of volunteers and financial support from numerous businesses and individuals. The show is presented in partnership with Wisconsin Farm Technology Days, Inc., UW-Extension, and the host county. Take a look at the specific activities held at the 2009 show at www.dodgefarmtech.com.

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