

Leaders Reflect on Farm Technology Days Impact

Eighteen months have passed since Pierce County hosted the 2010 Wisconsin Farm Technology Days (FTD) at the Roger and Beverly Peterson Family Farm near River Falls. Numerous past hosts of this event in other counties describe the impacts as if they were the tail of a comet passing overhead and the tail can be seen for a long time. Just about every Pierce County citizen saw the site come to life and the thousands of visitors hosted. The 13 members of the show's executive committee, 42 committee co-chairs and the 1500 volunteers strongly planned and delivered the first FTD show for Pierce County. Immediately post-show, the UW-River Falls Survey Research Center published a research-based summary on the impact of the show. The total economic impact of the event was \$1,863,042, 33 jobs with labor income of \$595,186, and \$191,000 of additional taxes generated by sales and income tax.

Communities benefit from hosting Wisconsin Farm Technology Days. As evidence, many counties re-apply to host again in the future. Marathon County hosted again in 2011 and Barron County will be hosting a second time in 2013 after hosting in 1987. What these counties have found is the opportunity to invest in their communities. Scholarships are provided to applicants for post-secondary education, non-profit organizations have the opportunity to apply for community grants and many of these investments give returns for many years in the future. New leaders develop out of the FTD experience. Many gain leadership skills and confidence and go on to become leaders in other organizations, seek local school board roles, or go on to serve as a local elected official.

"Pierce County is following a similar pattern of other successful hosts", says Mel Pittman-Past Chair of Pierce County FTD. "It takes a while to assess the impacts of the show", Pittman adds. Following hosting, Pierce County Farm Technology Days as a non-profit, has funded twenty \$500 scholarships to students in Pierce County representing every school district in the county. In 2011, the non-profit awarded a total of \$51,000 to 18 community grants encompassing every area in the county and the bulk of the grants benefit youth. Many of these community grant projects are underway and will continue for several years to come. Those organizations will be reporting on the impacts of their grant projects in upcoming years. And, so the impacts of the event weren't measured in months, the benefits are being realized over years and another generation.

(Prepared by Greg Andrews, Pierce County Extension)