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United We Stand

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Inside

Grant helps explore alternative energy farming

By **BRYAN SCHAAF**
Staff Writer

WOOSTER — A \$250,000 grant for the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center will allow researchers to begin assessing the potential for farmers in Northeast Ohio to grow crops, not just for consumption, but also for purpose of alternative energy.

The grant, approved by members of the Fund for Our Economic Future, is the next step in the group's efforts to expand Northeast Ohio's \$8.2 billion agriculture industry. "We're trying to improve our over-

all business, and what we're doing is looking at what we can do in the agriculture sector," said Chris Thompson, director of marketing and communications for the Fund. "What can we do to shift from more commodity agriculture to more specialty or value-added agriculture? Or from locally grown foods to growing crops for biomass? The Fund understands the critical role agriculture plays in the vibrancy of our region. In Wayne County and other areas, protecting and enhancing agricultural land is a top priority for communities, and we want to find ways of helping them achieve that goal.

According to an FFEF release, there are more than 2,200 farms in Northeast Ohio and about 40 percent of the region's land is used for agriculture. Much of that land, though, is limited to commodity products, and each year more land is lost to residential and commercial development. Fund member Lud Huck said there are currently several individuals doing research work around Northeast Ohio, and part of the grant will be used to tie those researchers together. "This is going to touch everybody in

See Pg. A5 — FARMING

Fund OKs third phase
By **BOBBY WARREN**
Staff Writer

WOOSTER — The Fund for Our Economic Future started out as a three-year effort to help transform the quality of life in Northeast Ohio, and its members recently agreed to a third three-year phase.

The Fund's members have been working to improve the economic and entrepreneurial climate in the region, and Wayne County has been a vital part of it.

See Pg. A5 — PHASE



Northeast Ohio," said Huck. "This is a strong move into the development of agriculture both for food purposes and commercial purposes in the area of alternative energy. This is a research module for a year that will put the tools together and develop a method of communicating information amongst all interested agriculture people in the region."

Huck said crops, such as Russian dandelions, which produce latex that can be used in natural rubber, and the jatropha plant, which has nuts that produce larger amounts of oils that can be used in ethanol, would be prevalent alongside traditional plantings

Phase

(Continued From Page A1)

Members have raised \$55 million in the first two phases, and they will make financial commitments over the next several months leading up to Phase 3, which begins in February.

"Looking forward, the times are uncertain," said Lud Huck, who has worked with the Fund. "The Fund is going ahead to build on what it learned in the first two phases and add to that an adjustment for the conditions it assumes to exist in the future."

"The members' unanimous support for continuing our collaboration reflects both the tremendous progress we have made in helping strengthen the region's economy, as well as an appreciation that much work needs to be done to ensure a vibrant economic future for Northeast Ohio," said Fund Chairman David Abbott, who is also executive

like corn and soybeans.

"There are 15,000 vacant lots in Cuyahoga County alone where products like these could be grown that have commercial industrial value," Huck said.

Fund members concur that expanding the region's specialty agriculture production would result in higher incomes and job growth, and would also preserve the region's natural assets.

"Agriculture is a critically important industry to the economic future of our region, and this research will identify options to accelerate its growth," said Peter Meisel of the Meisel Family Foundation and co-chairman of the Fund committee that recommended the grant.

Dr. Casey Hoy, an entomologist at OARDC with a focus on agroecosystem health, will oversee much of the research, which is scheduled to be completed by next summer.

Hoy has already been working to build local sustainable food networks in the region, which is backed by a \$2.5 million U.S. Department of Agriculture grant.

"Agriculture is certainly one of the biggest industries in Ohio, and Northeast Ohio leads the pack in that whole area," said Dr. William Ravlin, assistant director at OARDC. "The idea is rather than shipping in produce from Florida, California, Mexico or somewhere else, what is the potential to produce food locally and distribute it? And what

is the potential to do so with a solid product that efficiently links food production with consumers and builds the local economy as a whole?"

Huck said the \$250,000 grant not only has the support of the Fund, but also the Wayne Economic Development Council and Wayne Growth Partnership.

In addition to Hoy, Brian Gwin and Rod Crider from the WEDC, Jim Currie from the OARDC and Adam Briggs from the Shootroy Foundation have also been instrumental in moving the project forward.

Reporter Bryan Schaaf can be reached at 330-287-1645 or bschaaf@the-daily-record.com.

can take on part of the agenda and see that it is carried out, Huck said.

Phase 3 will build on the Advance Northeast Ohio economic action plan, which focuses on business growth and attraction; talent development; racial and economic inclusion; and government collaboration and efficiency.

In an effort to promote collaboration, a Web site www.efficientgovnow.org has been established. The site now features several proposals for government collaboration, including one from Rittman/Orrville schools for software and hardware to improve the operations of the Rittman/Orrville Compact. Voters will decide which proposals are funded.

Reporter Bobby Warren can be reached at 330-287-1639 or bwarren@the-daily-record.com. He's robwar0100 on Twitter.

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vehicles, occupying more than a half-mile of road space.

It was about two dozen members of the Marlboro Volunteers who showed up Sunday at the Wayne County fairgrounds to make sure all was in readiness for the MVPVA convoy that rolled in Monday night.

They also set up two authentic military field kitchens the organization owns, capable of feeding 250 people per hour. It has two 400-gallon water trailers and four large trailer-type generators capable of running the kitchens and portable lighting systems.

"We're here to work and serve. We have unique capabilities no one else has," said Liverett.

Liverett said the volunteers spent 4 1/2 hours getting the

and insurance, it would put two of the traveling museums on the road.

Liverett said the Volunteers scrape by paying for the high cost of gas and insurance by a donation bucket at the mobile museum, admissions to special events and donations.

He noted the food being served in Wooster was either donated or purchased at cost from local grocery stores.

But perhaps the thing members of the Marlboro Volunteers are proudest of, Liverett said, is a number of young boys and girls who started out helping in the group have been inspired to go on to careers in the U.S. military.

"I think that's what means the most to us," Liverett said. Reporter Paul Locher can be reached at 330-682-2055 or e-mail at ploch@the-daily-record.com.

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