

Farmers Co-op plans large Britt expansion

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By **ANGIE JOHANNSEN**, News-Tribune Editor

Construction will begin in April for \$1 million bunker, anhydrous tank

While news of an expansion at a local co-op is coming at a time of county negotiations with a planned ethanol plant, a spokesman for Farmer's Cooperative (FC) in Britt says his company's project has been planned for more than a year.

The co-op plans to build a one million-bushel bunker north of the current elevators located west of Britt on U.S. Highway 18. The project also includes plans to build a 30,000 gallon tank for anhydrous ammonia. FC is looking into hiring for custom applications.

"This is great for us, and the farmers who know about it are excited," manager Steve Cook said.

The bunker will store corn with 18 percent moisture. A grain dryer may be part of future plans for the company but are not expected at this phase.

Cook said Farmers Co-op has been expanding at other locations across Iowa in the past three years and this year it was Britt's turn.

"We looked at this for a couple of reasons," Cook said. "Ethanol and the proposed ethanol plant in Hancock County were a small part of that, but not the main reason.

"We're getting more corn on corn fields because farmers aren't rotating their crops. We could have 10 percent more acres this year, so we need 10 percent more space."

Booming crops last fall left piles of corn across the state. Cook says his co-op had 600,000 bushels. This ultimately led to a loss of nearly 2,000 bushels.

"Piling corn on the ground makes us nervous," Cook said.

The new bunker will have a conveyor system running from the elevator to the bunker. Last year's corn on the ground was run through on an auger. The new system will speed up the process for farmers bringing in their grain.

The construction cost for the bunker is \$1 million or \$1 a bushel. The construction on the project has been awarded to LeMar Industrial Corporation based in Des Moines. The conveyor cost is \$1,000 a foot, and will be built by Midwest Meter Inc. of Hampton.

Construction is expected to begin in April. Company officials have asked for special zoning because construction will be within 50 feet of the property boundary.

Hancock County Economic Development Corporation Director Cindy Schack says the estimated taxes on the facility will be \$25,210 per million dollars.

"This is a great project and comes in on the tail of the ethanol plant announcement," Schack said.

Britt Mayor Jim Nelson said he's also excited about the announcement.

"We appreciate the co-op," Nelson said. "We're a farm community and it's good to see the farm economy growing.

"Anything like that helps the whole county and the communities around it."

The elevator was built in 1974. The group merged with FC in 2000.

FC has corporate headquarters in Farnhamville, Iowa and is the largest farmer-owned local agriculture cooperative in Iowa with more than 5,800 members.

The Britt location employs two people.