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New Syngenta facility aims to bring farmers, research together

By Jeannine Otto

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A group of Syngenta executives and local officials officially broke ground on Syngenta's newest R&D Innovation Center in Malta, Illinois. The new 88-acre facility, when completed, will include 32,000 feet of laboratory space, over 18,000 feet of seed processing space along with greenhouse space and research fields. Pictured are Jamie Willrett (from left), farmer, DeKalb County; Paul Borek, DeKalb County Economic

Development Corp.; Eric Boeck, Syngenta head of marketing; G.W. Fuhr, Syngenta head of U.S. sales; Warren Kruger, Syngenta head of North America seeds development; Judd Maxwell, Syngenta corn product placement head; and Terri Ulrick, principal, BWBR. (AgriNews photo/Jeannine Otto)

MALTA, Ill. — With its location right in the middle of a now-former cornfield, as well as in the heart of the Corn Belt, one of the goals of the new Syngenta R&D Innovation Center — to bring researchers and farmers together — is close to being achieved.

Syngenta representatives, including those who will work at the new facility on Route 38 in rural Malta, and local officials recently broke ground on the new 88-acre research and development center.

“It completes the picture. It brings the farmer front and center into the conversation with our scientists who are developing those next generation products,” said Warren Kruger, Syngenta head of North America Seeds Development.

The ground had already been unofficially broken and earthmovers and dump trucks were working in the background as the official groundbreaking event took place.



Work already has started on the Syngenta R&D Innovation Center in Malta, Illinois. Syngenta officials along with local officials attended an official groundbreaking ceremony recently. The new facility will be a place for Syngenta researchers to engage with each other and with local farmers. (AgriNews photo/Jeannine Otto)

The 88-acre facility will include over 70,000 square feet of laboratory, office and collaboration space along with seed processing and equipment storage. In addition, the new center will have greenhouses and research fields.

“This will allow our scientists to see, touch and feel first hand the innovations they have been working on, but also to open up and share it with the community, the farmers. They will be able to see firsthand some of those next generation products that our scientists and researchers are working on,” Kruger said.

One of those farmers who will be close to that research is Jamie Willrett, of Willrett Farms in DeKalb County. Willrett sold the land for the facility.

“It’s exciting to see Syngenta put roots down here in our backyard, in this community. We will be able to see firsthand, maybe even a little preview, of some of the things that will come out of here,” said Willrett, whose family settled in the area in the 1850s.

Willrett said that Syngenta is the latest to join the long tradition of agriculture innovation that has come out of the DeKalb County and northern Illinois region.

“This area is rich in agricultural heritage, our production capabilities, the research that we’ve seen and developments over the years due to the people that are involved, the commitment to their work, the great soils that we have, the climate and the technology is such as what we hope to see come forward out of this facility,” Willrett said.

For one of the speakers, Judd Maxwell, Syngenta North America corn product placement head, the commute to work will get smaller. Maxwell and his family live in nearby Sycamore.

“Rooting our R&D efforts right here in the Corn Belt is key to our strategy to keep farmers at the center of what we’re doing and really understanding what keeps farmers up at night, what solutions they want to have in the future and the challenges they face each season and really getting that real-time feedback to make sure that we are staying rooted in our strategies and for developing our products,” Maxwell said.

He added that the facility is a demonstration of the brand bringing innovation literally down to earth.

“Innovation is a nice word, but you have to be agile in your innovation and change your strategies to meet the farmers’ needs as we develop new products. The pillar that we stand on is putting the farmer at the center of everything we do and I think this facility will give us a foundation to start that conversation or to build upon that conversation as we develop our products and strategies,” Maxwell said.

The Malta facility will join existing Syngenta R&D Innovation Centers throughout the United States in an exchange of ideas and research.

“The cool thing about this is it is right here in the heart of the Corn Belt, but it is really part of a larger strategy and that larger strategy is it links together all of the R&D Innovation Centers that we have throughout North America. So, when we do research we are really trying to meet the needs of farmers across the continent,” Kruger said.

With plot signs of Syngenta’s flagship seed brands, Golden Harvest and NK, leading the way to the groundbreaking site, Eric Boeck, Syngenta head of marketing for North American seeds, said he was excited for the facility and what it would mean to those brands.

“We are going to take those innovations and work with farmers to place products and help those innovations come to live with digital tools, maximizing yields and bringing those traits and agronomics to life. Our NK and Golden Harvest seed brands are going to gain momentum and we are excited for the additional value that they are going to be able to bring to farmers from this facility,” Boeck said.

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Field Editor



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