

Mid-Iowa News

09/09/2008

ISU breaks ground on biorenewables laboratory

By: Kathy Hanson , Special to The Tribune

Iowa State University President Greg Geoffroy's operation of a John Deere 710g backhoe to break ground for ISU's Biorenewables Laboratory on Monday was more than symbolic.

According to members of ISU's faculty, the ISU Foundation, the Iowa Board of Regents and the Iowa Legislature, it was Geoffroy's heavy lifting in leadership for the past two years that culminated in the funding and planning for the facility.

The Biorenewables Research Laboratory is the first phase of the \$99 million, 166,000-square-foot Biorenewables Complex. The \$32 million BRL building, to be located on campus north of Howe Hall, will serve as the new headquarters for ISU's Bioeconomy Institute and provide a central home for the university's discovery, outreach and educational activities in biorenewables.

Two additional buildings will be built to house the agricultural and biosystems engineering department with an open atrium connecting all three sections.

Geoffroy said the groundbreaking brings ISU one step closer to its goal of being the world center for the emerging bioeconomy.

"It's our responsibility to ensure Iowa prospers and leads the bioeconomy," he said. "The bioeconomic movement is unlike any movement we've seen in history in terms of an opportunity for technology and research to spur economic and commercial development. Only those who move quickly and collaboratively will emerge as leaders. "

Robert C. Brown, Iowa Farm Bureau director of the Bioeconomy Institute, said, "ISU's leadership had the foresight to take on this initiative before anyone else thought it mattered."

Geoffroy said ISU is very grateful to the Iowa Legislature for its bipartisan effort to fund the first building in the complex, but now "we need to encourage leaders to keep investing."

For example, according to Iowa State News Service, Virgil Elings, a 1961 graduate of ISU's college of engineering, has already committed \$5 million toward the project's second phase. In his honor, the building



By Ronnie Miller/The Tribune

Robert Brown, left, director of Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering for the Office of Biorenewables Programs, and Iowa State President Greg Geoffroy, hold a shovel of dirt after breaking ground at the future site of the ISU Biorenewables Laboratory on the Ames campus Monday. The building will be located between the College of Design and Howe Hall.

housing the department of agricultural and biosystems engineering will be named Elings Hall.

Regents' President David Miles called the groundbreaking "historic" and said it resonates with the regents' policy statement putting Iowa at the center of activity in the world's bioeconomy.

Echoing Geoffroy's appreciation of the Legislature's funding, Miles said such foresight will have "a huge positive impact."

In terms of ISU's leadership in all economic sectors, Miles cited its \$22 million partnership with Conoco Philips and the National Science Foundation grant of \$18.5 million as examples of the types of collaborations essential to moving forward in the emerging bioeconomy.

Iowa Sen. Jack Kibbie, D-Emmetsburg, said ISU's biorenewables initiatives are good news for the state.

"Biorenewables are creating hundreds of jobs, and ag schools are prospering, keeping young people here and bringing back the brightest and the best who left," he said.

Brown said ISU's Bioeconomy Institute promises to keep his graduate students "very busy."

According to the university, the complex will allow ISU to:

- * Provide a central location for biorenewables-related research, education and outreach.
- * Bring most of the agriculture and biosystems faculty and classrooms to one central location for a cohesive learning environment.
- * Offer classrooms and laboratories supporting increasingly complex technology needs.
- * Increase graduate student recruitment and enrollment.
- * Improve faculty recruitment and retention to bolster learning and research.

According to Andy Heggenstaller, an ISU agronomy student who received the George W. Carver Prize for Outstanding Achievement in Biorenewables, the groundbreaking for the BRL ties Carver's historic vision to the present and the future.

"Carver's vision was broader than finding new uses for food crops," he said. "He envisioned bringing science and technology to bear on economic growth with environmental sustainability. And that's what we're doing here today."