

High Plains Farm Credit celebrates 100th anniversary with gift to Fort Hays State

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HAYS, Kan. -- Farm Credit has been devoted to agricultural financing for 100 years. High Plains Farm Credit, which covers 22 counties in central Kansas, celebrated its milestone anniversary in style with a \$250,000 donation to Fort Hays State University.

The gift will be divided in half between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Economics, Finance and Accounting.



The donation was announced at a news conference Wednesday, Dec. 14, in the High Plains Farm Credit Lobby in McCartney Hall. The area, named in honor of High Plains Farm Credit, features large displays with the organization's history on the north and south ends of the first-floor lobby, as well as four bronze briefings depicting a Kansas farm through its first 100 years.

Members of the FHSU community gathered to thank High Plains Farm Credit for the donation, which will help provide scholarships and services for Fort Hays State students.

"This will be utilized to increase scholarship opportunities for our students and allow us to provide state-of-the-art agriculture technology for our production and management students," said Don Benjamin, interim chair of the Department of Agriculture. "It will be utilized greatly within our department."

The majority of the gift will be used for scholarships -- \$80,000 to each of the two departments -- as part of FHSU's Journey Campaign, an aggressive \$100 million campaign launched this past fall that will benefit scholarships, student life, programs and athletics.

The remaining \$90,000 of the High Plains Farm Credit gift will equally support the two departments' unrestricted accounts.

"Unrestricted funding is very valuable," said Mark Bannister, dean of the W.R. and Yvonne Robbins College of Business and Entrepreneurship.

"It can be used to purchase equipment or fund new initiatives," he said, adding that it is especially valuable with anticipated state budget cuts.

Marissa Bland, a senior agriculture student from Lucas, talked about how scholarships helped her make her way through college without any debt. "That has been attainable because of generous donors like you," she told the group of High Plains Farm Credit board members present at the news conference.

For years, High Plains Farm Credit has funded two scholarships for Fort Hays State students, but this is by far its largest one-time gift.

Doug Thurman from Larned, president and CEO of High Plains Farm Credit and an FHSU alum, is proud of the fact that "one-third of our employees are Fort Hays State graduates."

"I'm proud that out of 36 employees, all were born in western Kansas, " Thurman said. "Our roots are really deep in western Kansas. "

"This will help solidify the bond between the Farm Credit and the university even more," board member Tim Benoit from Damar said. Benoit also is an FHSU graduate, as is his wife and daughter. His son, Alex, will graduate from Fort Hays State this week and return to the family farm.

Benjamin said there are 299 agriculture majors on campus and 19 online this year. That was an overall increase of about 25 from a year ago, and currently show about an 8 percent increase in applications for next year. He said the additional scholarship opportunities for agriculture majors will be invaluable to a growing program. Benjamin cites two major reasons for the increase: Price point and experience.

He used as an example one agriculture major from Colorado who "drives through Fort Collins, Colo., to attend Fort Hays State because it's less expensive to go to school here. To her, it's economics."

He also said the experience on the university farm that students receive is priceless.

"We can teach them the theory behind the subject in the classroom," Benjamin said, "but we can't teach them the experience."

Bland agreed. "The college is blessed to have such a great college farm to work with and instructors who work tirelessly to help students learn and achieve their goals," she said. "Your gift will allow the farm to improve some of the facilities and equipment. The agriculture department as well as the business department are very thankful of your donation and your confidence in Fort Hays State University to continue to grow and excel."

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To learn more about High Plains Farm Credit, call 785-625-2110 or visit HighPlainsFarmCredit.com. To learn more about FHSU's Foundation, call 785-628-5620, email the office at foundation@fhsu.edu or visit <http://foundation.fhsu.edu>.

