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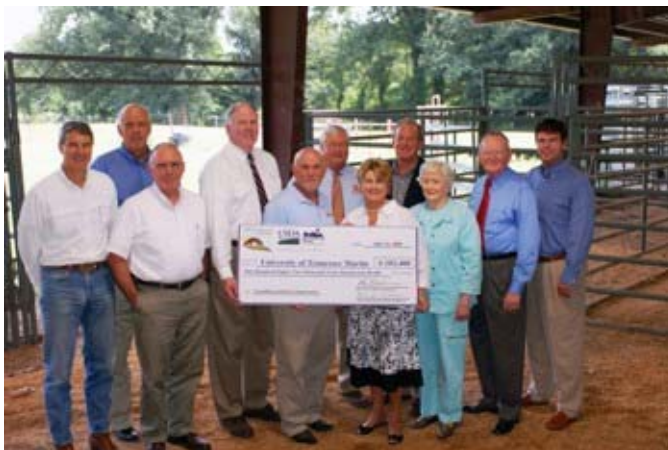
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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State, Rural Development Funding to Expand Smith Livestock Merchandising Facility

MARTIN, Tenn. – USDA Rural Development State Director Ruth Tackett and Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture Ken Givens joined University of Tennessee at Martin Chancellor Tom Rakes and other state and local officials today to announce the expansion of the Ray and Wilma Smith Livestock Merchandising Facility on the UT Martin campus.



The expansion project, funded by \$127,000 Tennessee Department of Agriculture and \$55,000 Rural Development grants, will provide expanded exhibition and stalling areas to permit hosting larger and more diversified livestock events.

“UT Martin is a great partner in helping to support and develop our agricultural industry. We’re proud to support the expansion of the Smith livestock facility through the Tennessee Agricultural Enhancement Program,” said Commissioner Givens. “This project will have a lasting effect on the local rural economy by enhancing marketing and promotional opportunities for West Tennessee livestock producers.”

The TAEP was established in 2005 by Gov. Phil Bredesen and supported by the Tennessee General Assembly to help improve animal health and livestock production and to encourage farm diversification in Tennessee.

“Agricultural production is a big part of the economy in our rural communities,” added Tackett. “I am proud that Rural Development has the financial resources to partner with UT Martin and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to help farmers and ranchers expand their markets and increase sales.”

Rural Development’s rural business enterprise grant program provides assistance to public or not-for-profit entities to support community economic development programs that assist small businesses in developing local business infrastructure, providing job training, conducting feasibility studies and providing technical assistance to businesses and community leaders.

Currently, the merchandising facility includes a sales and exhibition area and is the site of numerous regional livestock shows and sales.

“We have simply outgrown the existing facility and are having to use tents and outside pens to pen animals for current sales,” said Dr. Jerry Gresham, UT Martin Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources chair.

The center was dedicated in April 2004 and was named in recognition of the Smiths’ \$50,000 gift to renovate an existing campus facility, which leveraged other gifts, including a \$100,000 grant from USDA Rural Development and a \$25,000 commitment from Dr. and Mrs. David Gordon of Covington. The Smiths are Huntingdon residents. Mr. and Mrs. Wayne McCreight of Dresden and Mr. and Mrs. Crawford Gallimore of Martin also made significant commitments to the facility.

“It is gratifying to see the growth of the original concept made possible by the Smith gift now expand in scope through the support of the USDA and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. When private, state and federal partnerships join forces, successful ventures are assured,” said Rakes.

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