

HERALD-WHIG

Ursa Farmers Cooperative expects new Camp Point facility to be operating for this fall's harvest



The new Ursa Farmers Co-op location seen from Highway 24, east of Camp Point on Tuesday, Mar. 3, 2020. The grain elevator will cover 15 acres of land. | H-W Photo/Katelyn Metzger
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CAMP POINT, Ill. -- Ursa Farmers Cooperative expects a new Camp Point facility to be up and running in time for this fall's harvest.

UFC General Manager Roger Hugenberg said the \$13 million project better meets customer needs while strengthening the co-op's ties to Camp Point.

"This facility is going to be built for today's farmer, whether that guy is farming 50 acres or 5,000 acres," Hugenberg said.

"Our window is shorter to get the crop planted, to get the crop harvested, so equipment gets larger and needs are bigger," he said. "The new facility will be designed for speed, space and efficient traffic flow. It won't be complete, but it should be ready to receive grain by this fall's harvest."

Construction began in late February on the north portion of a 15-acre site in Camp Point's industrial park just east of the former Dollar General. UFC bought the site from Adams Electric Cooperative, and it provides room for future expansion along with easy access from U.S. 24.

"That's the perfect place for them," Camp Point Mayor Daniel Mock said. "To get them closer to the outskirts of the village is easier on them, easier on local traffic and quicker in and out for local farmers."

Equally important, the building project maintains an inland location for UFC to counter concerns about tying all its resources to the Mississippi River.

"The river for us is the most efficient, but it comes with its challenges as well," Hugenberg said. "We believe that our shipment days are going to be more limited. We are working with an older transportation system, a lock and dam system built in the '30s. It's going to continually require more down time for repairs and maintenance."

With the location equidistant from UFC's river terminal and the Illinois River, "the Camp Point location allows us to diversify our bid structure, how we work our bid, so we're not completely tied" to the Mississippi, said UFC's Susie Wray, who works with crop insurance and grain marketing. "We're investing our resources to help our patrons who have aided in our success."

The facility will replace the location operated since 1992 by UFC in the center of Camp Point where space limited the possibility of expansion.

"Camp Point is a good market area. We've got a loyal following, a strong customer base, but we were where we had to spend some money over there and make some upgrades or exit that market," Hugenberg said. "We've chosen to be part of that community and to grow it."

The new site will offer a community room available for public events, similar to what UFC has at its corporate headquarters north of Ursa, and office space to begin offering grain marketing, crop insurance and seed services available at other UFC locations.

The facility will have more employees -- close to four full-time and several part-time compared to the current site's two full-time and one part-time -- and more capacity with two 1.4-million-bushel grain bins and two 60,000-bushel bins for storage of 2.92 million bushels compared to current storage of 206,000 bushels.

Dumping a load of grain at the current site can take 20 to 30 minutes, depending on the size of the truck, while Hugenberg expects that to take less than 6 minutes for any truck or wagon with a one-way flow of traffic at the new site.

The design includes vacuums to capture dust as loads of grain are dumped and grain drying fans with motors operating at lower noise levels.

"We spent a lot of money on things to make it to where we are a good neighbor," Hugenberg said.

Farmers also will benefit from "real-time" technology incorporated into the facility's design to track the number of bushels delivered and their quality.

Mock, Camp Point's mayor, already is in the habit of driving by the site to check out the progress.

UFC -- which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year and represents about 4,400 members in Illinois, Missouri and Iowa -- began discussions last year with the village on the project. Mock said the village approved a height variance for the bins and the elevator's leg before construction began.

"It's not everyday somebody has the idea to build a project like this in a smaller community. We had to take advantage of it while we could," Mock said.

"They estimate the tax bill will be somewhere north of \$200,000 a year. Roughly 40 to 50% will go to the school district. I estimate we'll get \$12,000 to \$15,000 a year on revenue off that," Mock said. "Every little bit helps."

Local businesses also could see a boost in sales tax revenue during construction and after the facility opens.

"The more foot traffic we get through the village, the more they boost their sales," Mock said.