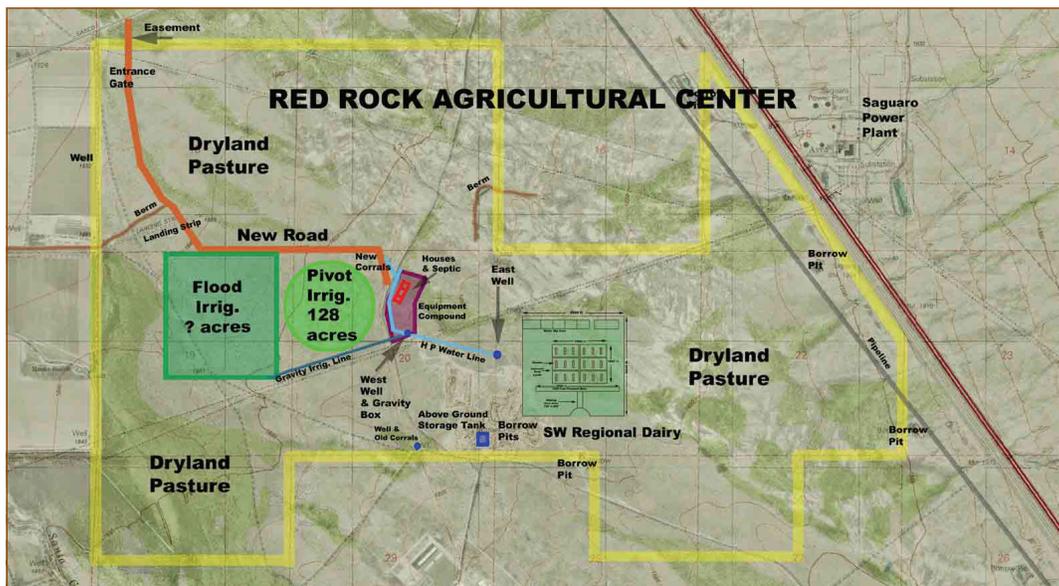


Red Rock Agricultural Center

Sited on more than 4,600 acres in Pinal County

by Susan McGinley



The new center will feature dryland pasture, irrigated crops and a dairy.

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences has a new agricultural center, located approximately 35 miles north of The University of Arizona campus. Sited on 4,673 acres of state land administered by the college under an institutional lease from the Arizona State Land Department, the Red Rock Agricultural Center (RRAC) will open in early 2006. It will be operated by the Campus Agricultural Center (located in Tucson) with three full-time employees to provide research support and generate farm commodity income for the college.

“The Red Rock site will serve as a replacement for the Marana Agricultural Center, recently sold,” says Colin Kaltenbach, director of the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station. “This new center gives us an opportunity to design a facility that will hopefully accommodate modern-day agricultural science but will also continue to work 10-15 years from now as needs change.”

The convenience of conducting large-scale field research projects within a half-hour’s drive of the main campus is invaluable for research faculty, staff and students based in Tucson. The center provides an excellent site for research in plant breeding, weed control, plant pathology, insect management, fertility and nitrogen management, soil conservation, alternative crops, and other areas of agronomic interest.

“The RRAC has essentially the same soil type, terrain and altitude as the Marana Ag Center,” says Randy Ryan, assistant director of the Arizona Agricultural Experiment Station. “However it is located in a more remote area, allowing farming operations to continue, whereas the Marana Ag Center was being encroached on by development. Our neighbors to the south are the Pinal Air Park and Western Army National Guard Aviation Training Site.”

Immediate facilities to be built include 160 acres of flood-irrigated fields, 128 acres of pivot-irrigated fields, irrigation infrastructure, an electrical distribution system, a domestic and irrigation water supply, septic system, three residences for farm supervisory personnel, a maintenance/office/shop facility and support buildings.

Future facilities may include a 1500-animal dairy research center to replace current dairy operations at the Campus Agricultural Center.

“The research/production dairy will provide an invaluable asset for implementing dairy management practices and give students an opportunity to learn how to operate a dairy,” Ryan says. He notes that the current dairy at the Campus Ag Center is hemmed in by houses, limiting its size and productivity. Dairy operations have exploded in Arizona, with 123 dairies statewide. The new larger facility will allow for sustained growth of dairy programs and provide for new innovative research programs to grow in the future.

“In addition, we hope to incorporate innovative energy programs to reflect the original name of the ranch proposed in the early 1970s as ‘Energy Ranch,’” Ryan says. “It would include bio-methane, solar, alternative plants and other energy sources and we are actively pursuing corporate partners to implement these ideas.”

The first crops will be planted at the RRAC in April 2006. ✂

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