

FVC building shuttle train loadout facility

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 17 May 2012 21:12 -

\$18 million facility will

provide better access

to BNSF rail lines

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

Frenchman Valley Coop (FVC) began construction April 1 on a new \$18 million shuttle train load-out facility west of Culbertson.

FVC General Manager Jim Chism said construction culminates two years of planning for the new grain-handling facility. With another year of construction ahead, the facility should be ready for the 2013 wheat harvest.

Chism said the location gives them direct access to both directions of the main rail line operated BNSF Railway, as well as the short line coming from Imperial operated by NKC Railnet.

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Chism said access to BNSF's main lines represented a key factor in the location of the new facility. He said they looked at five different locations before choosing the Culbertson site, which is off the south side of Hwys. 6 & 34 about a mile west of Culberston.

He said the site provides the ideal location and will allow FVC to funnel a large amount of grain from the region into the facility.

Chism explained the new facility will enable them to load unit or shuttle trains that include 110 jumbo cars, holding 4,000 bushels each. Once the train enters FVC's site, the cars are never unhooked as it proceeds to its final destination.

By using the unit trains, FVC can ship grain directly to markets across the country. This provides the coop with far more marketing flexibility with direct access to markets in Texas, California, Oregon, Louisiana and Mexico.

Chism said adding the facility enables them to handle and ship grain in a much more efficient manner, along with adding market flexibility.

He said the facility was a competitive necessity to keep up with the needs of its producers.

Speed is the name of the game, he noted, and that's what the new facility is all about.

During harvest, the facility will also operate as a grain receiving unit with in and out scales, along with two pits capable of handling 30,000 bushels of grain per hour.

The site will include three 250,000-bushel concrete storage silos along with a 1 million-bushel covered bunker.

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A 200,000-bushel steel bin for wet storage will be erected, alongside a dryer with the capability of drying 7,000 bushels per hour.

The load-out side will include a grading room and equipment to move 50,000 bushels of grain an hour into the rail cars.

Chism said once the unit train arrives at FVC site, they have 16 hours to load the train and get it back into the system.

As a result, the facility will operate on a 24/7 basis. It will create four new jobs, Chism said, along with four more people needed during the loading process.

At 50,000 bushels per hour, he said they can load a train in about nine hours, assuming there are no problems.

To get trains off the rail lines and into the site, contractors will build 5,000 feet of access rail line. Another 8,000 feet of rail will be built in a loop to handle the unit train during the loading process.

FVC acquired a total of 439 acres from seven different property owners to locate the new facility.

Chism said they will also move grain into the facility from their other sites by either rail or truck. Freight prices will determine which will be the best mode at any given time.

UP unit train facilities

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FVC added unit-train capabilities on the Union Pacific rail lines when they acquired elevators in Chappell and Kimball in 2008.

Chism said unit-train facilities already existed at those two locations but they have been working on upgrades to improve loading speeds. The Chappell site is again operational with the Kimball site to come back on line in July.

Chism noted having access to a second major rail line provides additional marketing flexibility.

FVC among the largest 65 coops in the country

Based on revenues, Frenchman Valley Coop headquartered in Imperial stood at the 64th largest cooperative in the U.S. in 2010, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The rankings are based solely on revenues. In 2009, FVC was among the top 50 at 46. However, crop losses suffered in the region in 2010 drove revenues down to \$419 million from 545 million in 2009.

FVC General Manager said the coop has been in the top 100 for a number of years and ranks near the top 50 in storage space and fertilizer sales.

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FVC's operations span from McCook to the east and just past Pine Bluffs, Wyo., on the west.

Their other Nebraska locations include Benkelman, Beverly, Chappell, Culbertson, Dalton, Dix, Enders, Grant, Hamlet, Kimball, Lodgepole, McCook, Palisade, Perry, Potter, Sidney, Venango and Wauneta. Locations in Wyoming include Burns, Lindbergh and Pine Bluffs.