

Running on grass

Biofuels firm seeks expansion at Pickett Park

Nottoway County officials are exploring a variety of additional grant funds to expand an innovative local industry that's saving the state big money and putting dollars into pockets of area farmers.

Ohio-based FDC Enterprises--which has its Nottoway Biofuels operation in County-owned Pickett Park east of Blackstone--grows, harvests, bales, stores, processes, and distributes locally-grown native warm season grasses.

Among FDC's clients is state-run Piedmont Geriatric Hospital near Burkeville, which has been running its boiler on warm season grasses raised and processed by FDC.

During a presentation Thursday to Nottoway County's Economic Development Committee, Fred Circle of FDC said his firm estimates it is saving Piedmont hospital \$531,000 over a five-year period and avoiding the use of 361,000 gallons of fuel oil during that time.

Piedmont last year burned grass for 131 days, up from 44 back in 2011 and saved about \$1,300 per day.

The firm has become a leader in the biofuels industry and, in fact, effectiveness of the operation at Piedmont has attracted national attention, Mr. Circle said.



FDC also hopes to do business with other state institutions, including Nottoway Correctional Center.

FDC pays landowners anywhere from \$50-\$60 per acre rent for planting and harvesting warm season grasses. A 10-year contract is required. Circle's firm has established more than 3,000 acres of natural native warm season grasses in Virginia, including a very successful site in Lunenburg.

FDC also supplies native warm season grass for poultry bedding to growers like Tyson and several others.

Committee members were told that multiple grant funds may be available, and that some grants might be used as part of Nottoway County's required local match for other grants.

Nottoway obtained \$882,000 from the state Tobacco Commission for the firm's current operation in Pickett Park, which was built in 2012 on Butterwood Trail off of Dearing Avenue. The County's "match" consisted of the site at Pickett Park, work by County staff, Piedmont Geriatric's boiler purchase, and FDC's contribution at equipment.

FDC seeks to double its building space to store more large round bales.

Nottoway hopes to recover its investment for the building by monthly rent from FDC.