



GROUNDBREAKING INITIATIVE PLANNED FOR KELLEY FARM

Not long ago, most Minnesotans grew up on farms. Today, fewer than two percent of us do. As we've moved away from farming, we've become removed from the realities of how food is produced.

To help people reconnect with the origins of what they eat, the Minnesota Historical Society is proposing to expand programming and facilities at the Oliver H. Kelley Farm Historic Site in Elk River. The goals are to demonstrate contemporary as well as historic agricultural practices, offer an improved learning environment for visitors and provide a venue for discussing issues in food production today. If funds requested from the state legislature are approved, the project would be complete in 2012.

"Many children who come to the Kelley Farm know very little about where their food comes from," said Nina Archabal,

director of the Minnesota Historical Society. "We have a responsibility to connect them with farming today as well as in the past."

"Agriculture is Minnesota's second-largest industry," added Bob Quist, site manager of the Kelley Farm. "Today, it's incredibly diversified and complex, and we can tell people that story."

Plans call for modern crops, livestock and equipment to be on display on the way to the visitor center and the historic farm, which will continue to be operated as it was in the time of Oliver Kelley. Guests would walk back in time from contemporary to 19th-century agriculture, seeing firsthand the differences between past and present varieties, animal breeds and equipment, and the trade-offs they represent. For instance, heirloom corn is very drought-resistant; today's hybrid corn

requires significantly more water but also has a much higher yield.

The steps between farm and food would be more clearly illustrated in the visitor center with the addition of a teaching kitchen. There, people could see food being prepared from produce that was raised and harvested just outside the door.

"With more and more people not cooking, they don't see raw ingredients. They see packaged food," said John Crippen, the Society's acting director of historic sites. "We can help people understand what goes into producing those raw ingredients."

Two classrooms and a community room would also be added to the visitor center, allowing the farm to accommodate more school groups. The classrooms would open onto a porch; on rainy days, students could stay in the shelter of the porch and still get


a close look at animals and machinery just outside.

"The new facilities will allow us to develop programming that aligns with school curriculum for older students, in addition to what we already provide for younger grades," said Quist. "We also plan to offer workshops for adults."

A new four-season shelter would be built, providing a flexible space for picnic lunches and special events. Planned additions also include an animal shelter, an animal husbandry building and a greenhouse.

Everything would be structured to meet visitor needs and program requirements. The project would also emphasize sustainability, incorporating gray water reuse, windmill-generated power, geothermal heat and a "green" roof on the visitor center.

Economic sustainability is part of the plan, too. The farm would accommodate more visitors, particularly school groups. Overhead would be minimized by working with outside partners; for example, modern livestock and machinery would be loaned to the Kelley Farm, saving money and allowing equipment to be changed out as technology advances.

"While farming itself may not be as immediate in most of our lives as it was in the 19th century, issues related to farming are," said Archabal. Think of concerns about food safety, global hunger, genetic modification, feedlots, obesity, biofuels, even the security of our nation's food supply. With an expansion, the Kelley Farm can become a place where these controversial issues can be discussed in a civil and productive way. 

Did you know?

- The Oliver H. Kelley Farm is a National Historic Landmark.
- Nearly 15,000 schoolchildren visit the Kelley Farm each year.
- Many teachers draw on a fall visit to the Kelley Farm for material to use throughout the rest of the school year.
- New programs planned for the Kelley Farm would include multi-disciplinary field trips that incorporate science and math, along with social studies.

State funding request

The Minnesota Historical Society is requesting \$9.857 million for the proposed Kelley Farm expansion, to better meet the educational needs of our citizens. The request is being discussed as part of this year's state capital budget or bonding bill. Look for updates at www.mnhs.org/historymatters.