



Consumers Energy Contributes \$25,000 to Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator Supporting Farmers and Entrepreneurs

WEST OLIVE, Mich.,
March 10, 2015 – A new statewide business incubator designed to spur agricultural innovation has received financial support from Consumers Energy.

Company representatives have presented a \$25,000 contribution to officials with the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator at the Ottawa County administrative offices. The contribution will support new business development centered on commercializing ag-technology ideas and inventions.

“Consumers Energy is pleased to be a part of this first-of-its-kind business incubator that focuses solely on commercializing ag-technology products,” said Garrick Rochow, vice president and chief customer officer. “A strong agricultural industry is vital to Michigan’s economic success. Consumers Energy looks forward to seeing this investment translate into ag-related jobs and businesses.”

The incubator, a nonprofit corporation, specializes in helping farmers and agriculture-related entrepreneurs



Christopher Laird, director of business customer experience for Consumers Energy, presented Kurt Brauer, chairman of the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator, a \$25,000 contribution from the company on Friday. Pictured, from left, are Dan Lennon, president and CEO of Michigan Turkey Producers, Karen McCarthy of Consumers Energy; Ottawa County Commissioner Don Disselkoen; Laird; Brauer; Jennifer Owens, incubator board vice chairwoman; Merle Langeland, president of the Ottawa County Farm Bureau, and Larry Kooiker, president and owner of Agritek Industries, Inc.

Photo courtesy of Paul Sachs

Media toolkit

LEARN MORE: Farmers, entrepreneurs, and business owners who have an equipment, machinery, or software product or idea for the ag industry can contact the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator:

- 616-738-4852
- agtech@miottawa.org
- www.agtechincubator.com

turn their machine, equipment or software ideas and inventions into profit-generating assets or new businesses. Originally started by the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners, the incubator is now attracting interest and investors across Michigan.

The incubator's services are geared toward farmers and entrepreneurs who have ideas or inventions that improve farming operations or solve farming-related problems. Depending on whether the client wants to sell or license their invention, or whether they want to start a new business, the incubator will work one on one with each client to move their concept forward rapidly.

These services include, but are not limited to:

- Validating concepts;
- Assisting in obtaining patents;
- Developing markets;
- Streamlining regulatory permits;
- Developing financial plans;
- Assembling management teams; and
- Developing supplier sustainability plans.

There is no fee for farmers or entrepreneurs to use the incubator's services if they are selected to be a client. Instead, the incubator shares in a small part of the successful business' sales.

Unlike typical incubators, the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator does not provide physical building space for its clients. This "garage incubator" model invests almost all resources in staff who help commercialize ag-technology and propel clients through business hurdles. When facilities are needed for clients, the incubator brokers space (office, loading dock, warehouse) on a piecemeal basis from existing landlords in the community.

"Our board of directors is honored to have Consumers Energy's support in our endeavor to create ag-technology businesses and jobs," said Kurt Brauer, chairman of the Great Lakes Ag-Tech Business Incubator. "Their generous contribution will directly benefit incubator clients by helping to offset the cost of providing business start-up services."

Consumers Energy, Michigan's largest utility, is the principal subsidiary of CMS Energy (NYSE: CMS), providing natural gas and electricity to 6.6 million of the state's 10 million residents in all 68 Lower Peninsula counties.

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