I. Executive Summary

On 23 April 2026 I met with representatives from the University of Tennessee Southern and the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) during a visit to the Giles County Agri Park. The visit confirmed strong mutual interest in a formal partnership centered on academic programming, agricultural research, student engagement, and enhanced community use of the facility, including the availability of a mobile large-animal vet clinic.

The Commission and Agri Park Board are partners in this initiative. The Board's stewardship of the facility, and its continued role in governance, are foundational to what follows.

The parties are expected to pursue a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the County, the Agri Park Board, and the participating University of Tennessee entities, establishing a framework for collaboration and guiding the development of a strategic plan over the next several months.

This paper is intended to:

- Inform the County Commission and the Agri Park Board of the emerging opportunity
- Outline the strategic implications for the Agri Park
- Prepare both bodies for future agreements and decisions

This effort has progressed beyond initial exploration and is entering a structured planning phase.

II. Recent Developments – April 23 Site Visit

The April 23 visit marked a meaningful transition from informal discussion to institutional engagement.

Key Takeaways

- **Validated Institutional Interest—** Both UT Southern and UTIA affirmed the Agri Park's value as a platform for applied agriculture, student experience, and regional engagement.
- **Multi-Level University Participation—** Engagement from both a regional campus and the flagship university opens the door to layered involvement across academics, Extension programming, and research.
- **Board Alignment—** The Agri Park Board will be a full partner in the planning process. The proposed partnership will preserve the Board's governance role and the rights and privileges of its member civic organizations, while expanding the facility's capacity to serve its agricultural mission.

- **Path Toward Formalization—** There was consensus that the next appropriate step is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) defining roles, access, and shared priorities among the County, the Board, and the University of Tennessee.
- **Strategic Planning Horizon—** The partnership is expected to lead to a formal planning process within the next year, addressing long-term land use, infrastructure needs, and programmatic opportunities.

This level of engagement positions the Agri Park as a **regionally significant educational and agricultural asset**, not solely a local event facility.

III. The Agri Park Today

The Giles County Agri Park is a county-owned, approximately 45-acre facility managed by the Agri Park Board, a nonprofit body representing civic organizations and County Commissioners. The Board has sustained the Park as both a community gathering space and a reflection of the county's agricultural identity.

Existing Assets

- **Volunteer Hall—** An active event venue in consistent daily use for community functions, private events, and civic activities.
- **Livestock Barn—** Supports agricultural programming, shows, and livestock events.
- **Outdoor Acreage—** Flexible ground suitable for research plots, trails, and expanded programming.
- **UT Extension Presence—** An established university footprint through ongoing educational programming.

Current Strengths

- High utilization and strong community identity
- Nonprofit Board providing continuity of governance
- Established partnership with UT Extension
- County ownership that ensures long-term site stability
- A flexible land base capable of supporting multiple uses

Strategic Reality

The Agri Park is a heavily utilized public asset operating without:

- A long-term strategic plan
- A capital improvement program
- Infrastructure capable of supporting future growth

Current funding from the County and from the civic organizations that participate through the Board is limited to bare-basic operations. No party has the capacity, on its own, to fund the long-term viability of the facility. There is no maintenance plan and no shared vision for the future.

This is not a sustainable model. Continued use without reinvestment can only lead to decline of the property.

Neither Board nor County has adequately maintained the Agri Park—we have merely deferred decisions about its future.

The proposed university partnership introduces a viable path forward. Implementation will require:

- A clear, multi-party governance structure with defined accountability
- Intentional long-term planning led jointly by the County, the Board, and University partners
- A commitment to partnership aligned with identified priorities

IV. Institutional Opportunity

While formal program definitions will emerge through the MOU and master planning process, discussions to date point to several areas of alignment.

Agricultural Research & Academics

- On-site research plots and applied agriculture programming
- Enhanced Extension footprint
- Field-based learning environments for students
- Integration with local agricultural producers and Extension networks

Athletics & Student Life

- Potential development of cross-country trails and outdoor training facilities
- Expanded recreational and student programming space

Community Engagement

- Expanded university presence within the county
- Joint programming with the Agri Park Board's member civic organizations and with agricultural groups
- A stronger connection between higher education and local community life

V. Path Forward

Based on current discussions, the following phased approach is anticipated:

1. Memorandum of Understanding (Near-Term)

- Names the County, the Agri Park Board, and UT as parties to the agreement
- Establishes intent to collaborate and defines initial roles, access, and shared priorities
- Preserves the Agri Park Board's governance role and the rights and privileges of its member civic organizations

2. Joint Master Planning Process (6–12 Months)

- Led jointly by the County, the Board, and the university partners
- Evaluation of land use and site layout, infrastructure capacity and deficiencies, and programmatic opportunities across academic, agricultural, and community uses
- Identification of phased development priorities and preliminary cost ranges

3. Phased Implementation (Longer-Term)

- Incremental capital improvements aligned with the master plan
- Expansion of university programming and presence
- Continued integration with community uses and local stakeholders under the Board's ongoing stewardship

VI. Roles of the Partners

The County Commission

As this effort advances, the County Commission will be asked to:

- Confirm its agreement with the partnership
- Empower institutional partners to invest, program, and operate within the Agri Park

The Agri Park Board

The Board continues as the steward of day-to-day operations and a full partner in planning. Its role under the MOU and master plan is expected to:

- Retain governance of the facility and its programming
- Preserve the rights and privileges of the Board's member civic organizations
- Represent the Park's agricultural mission and community identity in the planning process

- Coordinate with university partners on scheduling, shared use, and joint programming

The University Partners

- Bring academic, research, and Extension capacity
- Contribute programming, faculty and student engagement, and access to external funding channels
- Support the Park's agricultural mission through applied teaching and research

The intent of this partnership is to attract and align external investment—not to create a new County-funded capital obligation. No County funding commitment is contemplated as part of this initiative.

VII. Closing

Giles County now has a credible opportunity to elevate the Agri Park from a well-utilized but underfunded facility to a multi-purpose asset supporting education, agriculture, and regional engagement.

The April 23 meeting established institutional interest and a clear next step: formalizing a partnership framework among the County, the Agri Park Board, and the University of Tennessee, and initiating a structured master planning process.

The question before the County is not whether the Agri Park has value—it clearly does.

The question is how intentional the County and its partners choose to develop that value over the next decade.

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