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The Wilmington Air Park: A hub for foreign trade?*Business leaders visit Turkey to break down global trading barriers*By **ANDREA L. CHAFFIN**

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A trio of Clinton County's leaders recently embarked on a 10-day trip into Turkey, tasked with finding solutions to some of the area's major economic development questions, including those that may unlock the key to trading soybeans and livestock for the entire country.

Attending were Mike Curry, county commission president, Bret Dixon, the county's economic development director, and Brent Probasco, vice president of global logistics for R+L Carriers.

It's the second time area leaders have visited the middle eastern country. Dixon, along with various state officials visited the area in December 2011.

The trip revolved around several objectives. Among them, the idea that air transport of livestock could be the catalyst for a rebirth of air commerce at the Wilmington Air Park.

Cattle, from an export station in Sabina (Sabina Farmers Exchange, owned by John Surber), could be shipped to middle eastern countries via aircraft, instead of ship - a much quicker process.

While Surber's facility is already unique - one of only six in the U.S. - its proximity to a large, rural airport and the easy five-mile commute between the locations is what makes Clinton County stand out from the competition, Dixon said.

"We're the only ones that can do that," Dixon said. "It's hard enough to be a passenger on a plane on Chicago air, versus hauling in 300 head of cattle."

While Turkey can get beef from European countries, some of the products have been diseased. So, the country is trying to build it's own herd.

And if planes are bringing products such as cattle to Turkey, they need to be returning with products - something known as "backhaul." That's why leaders are trying to entice Turkish government leaders to export products to the U.S. through the Wilmington Air Park. They're also hoping to nail down an air cargo transportation carrier for the job.

"We pull up a map and show them how we're located within a day's travel to 60 percent of the U.S. population," Curry said. Then, Clinton County needs to prove it can efficiently take products to those people.

And that's where R+L comes in.

"You've got this gem in R+L that can take it to the next step," Dixon said. "We can get it in here and they can get it out because they already have reach all over the world. It's a highly respected company because of their strength, and they're in Clinton County."

R+L is already doing business in Turkey, and now, as a result of the trip, is doing even more. Probasco said he's working on negotiations for two new partnerships.

"We're here and a transportation logistics provider all over the world now, so it showed strength in the region, combined with our resources, as far as why some of these businesses should dip their toe in the U.S. market, why this is a good place to send their product," he said.

Turkish farms grow wheat, peaches, pomegranate, figs, chick peas, lentils, nectarines, olives, cucumbers and onions, among other items. It's possible that one day, Turkish olive oil - which is often traded to Italy, packed there as Italian Olive Oil and sold in U.S. stores that way - could be imported through Wilmington.

While Turkey is interested in exporting items, leaders and farmers also need to import items such as soybeans - a crop Clinton County and Ohio have in abundance.

But Turkish businesses want beans that are not genetically modified (often referred to as non-GMO). Clinton County and Ohio are able to provide non-GMO products, but Turkish government leaders are concerned non-GMO products could be contaminated by GMO crops.

On this, issue, Curry played the lead. A farmer himself, Curry worked to explain to officials how containerized beans can be sealed up at a Clinton County farm, and not unsealed until the container hits its final location. And, of course, all of that can be shipped at the Wilmington Air Park.

Containerized shipments of beans is already happening in Fayette County, Curry said, so he knows it can be done. There, beans are being shipped to Japan for tofu.

"The Minister of Agriculture is concerned that even if two containers are side-by-side, the dust can get into it from another - that's how nervous he is," Curry said. "We need to work with the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Agriculture and see if we can get some people over there to discuss that."

Dixon said Curry is on the verge of a break-through.

"What he knows right now can probably open the door for the whole country if he can get this solved," Dixon said. "It's not a big thing to get solved, but it takes knowing the right people and he knows them."

With much of these ideas, it may be just a matter of time before they take off, Dixon said. Clinton County has a lot to offer in the industry of global trade.

"We have companies saying they're ready and we have vast resources," he said. "It's amazing how proud you can be from a county in Ohio. You can be 7,000 miles away and so proud of all the things we can do."



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An official with the Konya Commodity Exchange in Konya, Turkey, presents a grain sample from a farm selling directly to mills. From left, Bret Dixon, Clinton County economic development director, Mike Curry, Clinton County commissioner, and Brent Probasco, vice president of global logistic at R+L Carriers. The trio of local leaders recently visited the country in an effort to spark local economic development through foreign trade.