

DOWAGIAC

SMC to host MSU ag tech program

LMC wine program prompted MSU to move

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DOWAGIAC—Michigan State University has landed a new home for its Southwest Michigan agricultural training certification program.

And its new host is delighted.

Randy Showerman, director of MSU's Institute of Agricultural Technology, said the program is setting up shop at Southwestern Michigan College after deciding Lake Michigan College is no longer a proper fit.

"From our point of view, we're moving because it was a good fit for the industry and a good fit for the students, and we were looking for a party that shared our beliefs," Showerman said in a phone interview.

The problem was not that LMC didn't share those beliefs, he said. Rather it is because MSU's program stands to compete with LMC's emerging wine production program.

"I felt very uncomfortable having two competing programs in the same institution," he said.

The ag tech program offers graduates MSU certifications in agricultural and food processing fields. Students can also use the credits toward as-

sociate's degrees, and SMC is touting the potential for transferring credits to four-year colleges.

Showerman said MSU has nine ag certification programs at its main East Lansing campus and four at partner community colleges.

He said 15 students have registered for the institute's SMC offerings, and he said he expects about 45 students by the fall semester. The students can earn certification in fruit and vegetable science, landscape management, agricultural operations and viticulture—the science of grapes and winemaking.

It's the latter that created a redundancy at LMC.

LMC is assembling staff and equipment for an associate's degree program in wine production.

Clint Gabbard, LMC's vice president of Student Services, said LMC hosted MSU's ag tech for four years.

"There was not a lot of participation in the program," he said.

He said there were only six MSU ag tech certification recipients in the last three years.

He said LMC's research indicated Southwest Michigan's wine industry wanted students with associate's degrees and lots of hands-on experience.

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Gabbard said the college's wine program will still work with MSU's Southwest Michigan Research & Extension Service, which is near the Napier Avenue campus. SWMREC performs grape research, among its many ventures.

SMC officials are championing the credit-transfer potential in ag tech. A Michigan Transfer Agreement-compliant degree means students can move general education credits anywhere in Michigan.

"What's better today is these articulation agreements to transfer," SMC Board of Trustees Secretary William M. White said in an SMC news release. White is a Cassopolis hog farmer and MSU graduate.

SMC spokesman John Eby said the college assigned office space for MSU ag tech coordinator Stacey Rocklin. The program is at no cost to SMC, he said.

SMC reported that ag tech will use a grape curriculum crafted by the Viticulture Enology Science and Technology Alliance.