

Viroqua Food Cooperative

PUB-RR-914

August 2011

Viroqua Food Cooperative
525 North Main Street
Viroqua, WI

Vernon County

Size: .75 acres

**Location: Along State Highway 14 in the
business heart of Viroqua**

**A Southwest Wisconsin community turns
a former brownfield into new jobs at a
locally-owned businesses.**

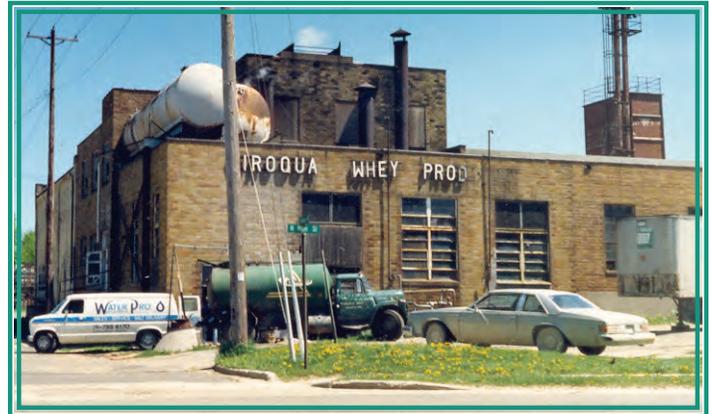
History

The cleanup and remediation of the former Viroqua Creamery property followed a common storyline: a community works with state and local partners to redevelop an abandoned eyesore along a highly visible thoroughfare.

The industrial use of this property began in 1914, when the Viroqua Creamery opened a new facility, adjacent to what was then known as the La Crosse and Southeastern Railroad. A filling station was eventually built on the site and later, a bulk petroleum facility operated just next to the gas station. The Creamery operated at the site for more than 50 years, closing its doors in 1967.

After three years of vacancy, a group of nine cheese factory owners purchased the property and established the Viroqua Whey Plant, to convert whey to animal feed. The facility was renovated and expanded. After 20 years in business, this too ceased operations, declaring bankruptcy in 1990.

No immediate buyer for the property could be found, and the owner became tax delinquent as the building went into disrepair.



After closing in 1990 the former Viroqua Whey Plant rusted away for nearly 10 years before the city stepped in to redevelop it (photo courtesy city of Viroqua).

Investigation and Cleanup

In 1993, the City of Viroqua Redevelopment Authority took the first steps to making the former creamery property a community asset once again. Officials condemned the property and demolished all the buildings on the site and conducted a Phase I and Phase II environmental assessment of the property.

Next, planners moved to address the leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs) hindering the redevelopment. In July 1996, tank removal, assessment and investigation activities were conducted on the property through state assistance. A 12,000-gallon #6 fuel oil tank was removed, along with 10 cubic yards of contaminated soil. At the same time, a 10,000 gallon #2 fuel oil LUST was removed with 360 cubic yards of contaminated soil.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Remediation and Redevelopment Program

PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/rr>



When Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) staff officially designated the site "closed" in 2001, they left requirements for an asphalt cap to be maintained over areas of residual soil contamination..

Further remediation activities were conducted in 2003, as the site was prepared for new construction.



The Viroqua Food Cooperative had such success at the redevelopment site, the organization added a second outlet (photo courtesy Viroqua Food Cooperative).

Redevelopment

The city found a buyer for the former creamery property when it connected with the Viroqua Food Cooperative. The Co-op's previous location was small and on a side road, so a highly visible, downtown location was very desirable.

Their new retail space was a six-fold increase in size – expanding operations to more than 7,000 square feet and adding a deli with a seating area.

Forty new jobs were created with the expansion, for a total of 55 employees. Eventually, increased business from the new location warranted purchase of a neighboring property –also a brownfield!– which was capped for more parking.

Although not LEED-certified, the Co-op incorporated many green LEED components inside and out.

Financial, Liability, Technical Assistance

Many groups came together to make remediation and redevelopment of the former creamery site a success.

Staff from the DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment (RR) Program provided technical assistance during the project, and reviewed the site for closure.

Additionally, DNR provided project assistance through the Brownfield Environmental Assessment Pilot (BEAP) program, which provided environmental assessments through a DNR contractor.

Once plans to build the new Viroqua Co-op were finalized, the city was awarded a \$102,000 Blight Elimination and Brownfield Redevelopment (BEBR) Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce. Funds paid for critical remediation activities in preparation for the redevelopment.

The city of Viroqua created a Tax Incremental Financing District around the property to help fund the remediation and new construction.

The Viroqua Food Cooperative purchased the property in 2005 for \$30,000 and opened in 2006. In 2010, the value had risen to \$985,500.

Contacts

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