

Rutgers Food Center breaks ground

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BRIDGETON -- With prospects for a productive future being a whole lot sunnier than the weather, leaders from around the state converged on the future site of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center for a groundbreaking ceremony Monday.

With the receipt of a \$2 million grant from the United States Economic Development Administration, Rutgers Food Innovation Center Director Louis Cooperhouse announced adequate funding has now been raised to begin construction on the center's new 23,000 square-foot food incubator facility.

"We have been waiting a very long time for this day," Cooperhouse said at the beginning of the ceremony.

The grant, which completes the \$7.4 million needed to begin construction, is the largest the EDA will make in the Philadelphia region this year, according to Paul Raetsch, regional director.

"Thank you for showing us a package we could make an investment in," Raetsch said.

The new facility will house state-of-the-art food processing equipment, technical and business support services and a hub for distance learning and continuing education, according to a press release available at the ceremony.

As an economic development outreach center of Rutgers University, the facility will help the RFIC provide assistance to farmers and cooperatives, startup food companies and established food companies, also according to the release.

More than 500 small businesses from all over the state have already taken advantage of the services the RFIC offers without the facility, and Cooperhouse said with a new building, success for small businesses in New Jersey will continue to improve.

Some of the products that the RFIC has already helped to develop were served at the ceremony.

Mayor Michael Pirollo said that early estimates calculated 1,000 jobs would be developed in the region over 10 years time as a result of the new facility, but he said Monday he thinks those estimates are too low.

"I think early estimates are wrong by at least one-half," he said.

Pirollo cited expansion and foreign business interest as reasons why he believes more jobs will be available.

"This is a great day for Bridgeton, this is a great day for Cumberland County and this is a great day for all of New Jersey," he added.

Cooperhouse said while the necessary funds have been raised and the groundbreaking ceremony has been held, the RFIC does not expect to award a contract to a builder for the facility until October or November of this year.

He said he anticipates a ribbon-cutting ceremony to be scheduled for some time in the fall of 2007.

Other contributions to the facility were made by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, the New Jersey Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, the New Jersey Agricultural Experimental Station at Rutgers University, the Cumberland Empowerment Zone, the City of Bridgeton and the State of New Jersey.