High-tech food facility holds grand opening in Bridgeton

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BRIDGETON - Various local, state and federal dignitaries gathered Friday morning to celebrate the grand opening of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center's new $8 million, high-tech facility on East Broad Street.

U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., joined U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-2nd, and others in applauding the work of the Food Innovation Center, or FIC, a unit of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station.

Started in 2001 as a way to reinvigorate the region's many food-based industries, the FIC has to date worked with more than 700 farmers, small business owners and food entrepreneurs in providing a variety of business-related services.

According to officials, the FIC's new 23,000-square-foot facility will combine food-processing space with state-of-the-art laboratory facilities to help technological advancements in the region's agricultural industry.

Charles Kuperus, secretary of the state's Department of Agriculture, said Friday that the FIC's work will help meet the increasing national demand for shorter market chains between producers and consumers.

"I think this has a great potential of making sure we reach those goals," he said.