Federal, State, And Community Partners Gathered To Celebrate The Grand Opening Of Rutgers Food Innovation Center

Rutgers University and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station officially opened their new 23,000 square foot Food Innovation Center business incubator and food processing facility in Bridgeton on October 17.

The Food Innovation Center (FIC) is a catalyst for economic development in the state and the surrounding region, and it has been recognized globally, nationally, and throughout New Jersey for the effectiveness of its economic development programs. The Center has been named “Incubator of the Year” by the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA), which represents an estimated 7,000 business incubator programs that exist worldwide. In addition, the USDA has recognized FIC as a national “Innovative Program Model”, for which it received a Partnership Award for “achievement as a model for community and economic development and jobs creation.” In addition, the USDA has recognized FIC as a national “Agricultural Innovation Center Demonstration Program.”

Richard L. McCormick, President of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, indicated that “All of these accomplishments have been achieved before the new state-of-the-art facility was even built. Now, because of the foresight, imagination, hard work, and cooperation of a number of partnering agencies, FIC is poised to expand significantly its client services and processing ability.” In May of 2007, The Food Innovation Center was also the recipient of The Rutgers Presidential Award for Research in Service to New Jersey for “contributions to the health and economic well-being of communities across New Jersey.”

Robert M. Goodman, Executive Director of the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station (NJAES) added, “With the completion of the new 23,000-square-foot food business incubator and processing facility, FIC is well equipped to cultivate new businesses, provide technical and business support, act as a hub for continuing education, and promote collaborative research and learning opportunities.”

Margaret Brennan, Director of Economic Development for the NJAES and a founder of the center, indicated, “Approximately 90 percent of the construction funding for the Food Innovation Center incubator facility originated from outside of the university, which illustrates the tremendous support that the Food Innovation Center has received from our partners.”

Funding for construction and operations to the Food Innovation Center has originated from federal, state and local agencies, and has included the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, US Economic Development Administration, US Department of Agriculture, State of New Jersey, New Jersey Casino Reinvestment Development Authority, New Jersey Commission on Science and Technology, New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Cumberland Empowerment Zone, and the City of Bridgeton.

“Our new 23,000 sq. ft. business incubator facility will greatly expand our capabilities, and enable the design, development, marketing, analysis, commercialization, and ongoing manufacture of food products for sale to retail and foodservice markets,” said Louis Cooperhouse, Director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center. He added, “This new facility allows the FIC to provide business and technology expertise to small and mid-size food companies in NJ, and utilize our outreach capacity to touch food and agriculture businesses throughout the nation.”

Since the origin of the FIC in 2001, over 1,000 companies have benefited from the center’s customized assistance and its educational programs. FIC clients include farmers and rural cooperatives, startup food companies, existing small and mid-sized food establishments, and retail and foodservice markets that seek to purchase locally supplied New Jersey products.