New Jersey Gearing Up for First-Ever Pavilion at New York Fancy Food Show

New Jersey companies looking to spotlight their products at the 52nd Annual Summer Fancy Food Show at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City have several additional incentives this year.

For the first time ever, the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, Rutgers Food Innovation Center and New Jersey Commerce Economic Growth and Tourism Commission are teaming up to present a “New Jersey Pavilion,” where Garden State companies will be grouped together in displaying their specialty food items.

In addition, to kick off this new effort, any qualifying company locating in the pavilion will receive $600 off the $3,100 cost of exhibiting at the three-day show.

“New Jersey has the second-highest membership in the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT),” said Logan Brown, economic development specialist with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture. “I’d say that more then half of the people on the floor of the Javits Center are from New Jersey or are doing business in New Jersey. Our primary focus with the pavilion is to develop new exhibitors, and I really feel there’s value for them in this activity.”

The pavilion is modeled after the one set up for New Jersey companies at the annual United States Food Export Showcase in Chicago, where smaller companies that might be just starting out at such shows benefit from the identification with their state and the technical assistance lent by the Department of Agriculture.

“It’s a huge audience at the New York show,” said Lou Cooperhouse, Executive Director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center. “As many as 30,000 people come through this show. We’ll be doing a lot to draw people to this pavilion.”

To help companies interested in the show prepare for the experience, Rutgers Food Innovation Center recently organized a half-day seminar on marketing specialty foods, which was held at the Rutgers EcoComplex in Burlington County, N.J. and featured a presentation by NASFT President John Roberts.

“Food is an $800 billion a year business in the United States,” Roberts said, “and the variety of businesses that now have some food application is growing. Currently, 25 percent of all businesses in the U.S. are involved in food in some way.

“You can’t think of a retail store with any traffic that doesn’t have some kind of food application. Even Victoria’s Secret has mints with their logo on them that they bring in from Australia.”

Because of the ubiquity of food retailing, Roberts said, “you don’t have to be in a Shop Rite or an A&P in the beginning to be a successful (specialty food) business. You can start smaller first.”
As the number of outlets has grown, so has the universe of what is considered a specialty food, Roberts said. “It used to be that specialty food was caviar and foie gras and that was about it,” he said. “Now it’s upscale barbecue sauce, upscale salad dressings.”

An emerging sub-category of specialty items are the “pharma-foods,” as Roberts called them.

“We’ve got a margarine coming in from Finland now that actually reduces your cholesterol,” he said. “It’s not being brought in by a food company, but by Johnson & Johnson.”

Patrick Lynch, the group sales director for NASFT, advised the seminar participants to remember that they are at a food show, emphasis on the show, if they attend the New York event.

“It really is show business,” he said. “You’ve got about two to three minutes to capture your audience. You must know your product back and forth, and you must know your competitor’s product back and forth.”

New Jersey-based specialty food producers interested in learning more about being a part of the New Jersey pavilion at the July 9-11, 2006 New York Fancy Food Show can contact Logan Brown at (609) 292-8856.

New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Charles M. Kuperus said this type of show underscores the connected nature of the state’s agricultural producers and its food processors and manufacturers.

“Especially with today’s transportation costs, it pays New Jersey’s food manufacturers and processors to seek their ingredients from nearby growers, which means more market opportunities for our agricultural producers,” said Secretary Kuperus.