BREITON, N.J. – The Rutgers Food Innovation Center today marked a milestone in its ambitious plan to build an $8.8 million food business incubator facility in Bridgeton when officials from the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) awarded them a $2 million grant. The CRDA board of directors unanimously approved the funding, which is the largest single grant the center has received to date. It is also the first grant CRDA, a state agency funded by Atlantic City’s casino industry, has awarded in the city of Bridgeton.

According to Rutgers President Richard L. McCormick, the CRDA grant demonstrates broad statewide support for the Food Innovation Center and its mission to stimulate and nurture economic growth of the state’s food and agriculture industries.

“We are deeply grateful for this tremendous grant,” McCormick said. “This investment demonstrates CRDA’s confidence in Rutgers and the Food Innovation Center to deliver significant benefits to New Jersey’s economic development.”

CRDA Executive Director Curtis Bashaw presented the $2 million grant to President McCormick, Cook College Acting Executive Dean Keith Cooper, Cook College Associate Dean Margaret Brennan, and Food Innovation Center Director H. Louis Cooperhouse during a ceremony attended by local, county, state and federal officials as well as some of the 250 clients the center has served since its founding in 2000.

“The Food Innovation Center is a total win-win,” said Bashaw. “Not only will it foster growth of the Garden State’s agricultural-based business and products, it will help new entrepreneurs test their products, it will create jobs and bring economic opportunity to New Jersey’s Southern Region for years to come,” he said.

Located in the heart of New Jersey’s agricultural and food processing industry, the Food Innovation Center is the first service-based and rural-targeted university food business incubator in the United States. The CRDA grant brings the total capital raised for the 23,000 square foot incubator facility to $5.4 million including funding from the city of Bridgeton, Cumberland Empowerment Zone, the state Legislature, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, and U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development Program.

(More)
$2 Million CRDA Grant
Add Two

Congressman Frank A. LoBiondo (NJ-2), who has been instrumental in acquiring federal funding for the center, said, “I’m thrilled to see the center receive this new money from CRDA. It will help the center leverage the million plus dollars in federal funds it has received in the last couple of years to continue its mission to assist small businesses in Southern New Jersey. It’s my hope that rural communities in the 2nd District will continue to benefit from the agricultural business training performed by the center,” he said.

"This is a wonderful announcement that will energize our agricultural industry and advance New Jersey's economy," commented State Assemblyman Douglas H. Fisher, vice chairman of the Assembly Agriculture Committee. "This funding makes New Jersey an innovator in new product development, promotes new value added products for the farming community and increases the job market in our part of the State," he said.

"This is a very promising industry, and it will undoubtedly strengthen our economy," added State Senator Stephen M. Sweeney (District 3). "We are fortunate that CRDA, our federal representatives and various state departments recognized the opportunities that a project like this will provide to our residents."

According to Bridgeton Mayor Michael Pirolli, the award is the result of a tremendous team effort of local, state and federal supporters from day one. “The entire city of Bridgeton is thankful. It is a key component to the city’s revitalization and will have decades of impact on Cumberland County as well as throughout South Jersey,” he said.

If all goes according to plans, Cook College hopes to break ground for the new facility at the Florida Avenue Industrial Park next winter, where the center will serve as the anchor to attract other businesses. In order to achieve that goal, the center must receive an additional $3.4 million in funding from other private organizations as well as state and federal agencies.

“The CRDA funding is a big boost for the center,” said Cooperhouse. “We’re very optimistic that the additional $3.4 million will come through and the Florida Avenue facility will be up and running in early 2007,” he said. “A tremendous amount of planning has gone into this project and it’s wonderful to see the vision becoming a reality,” said Margaret Brennan.

When complete, the new Food Innovation Center incubator will offer more comprehensive services to small farmers, food entrepreneurs and small to mid-sized food companies. The facility will include analytical testing in a food science lab, a distance learning center, shared-use production equipment and administrative space, plus expert technical and marketing consulting services from the center’s staff.

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