

New agricultural center could bring jobs
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Staff photo/Meg Huelsman

H. Louis Cooperhouse, director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, which broke ground Friday in Bridgeton, hopes the new center will create more than 1,000 jobs for the area.

BRIDGETON -- A Rutgers University agricultural center broke ground Monday and elected officials said the new facility would change the face of farming across New Jersey.

"We estimated that this center would create more than 1,000 jobs," Bridgeton Mayor Michael Pirolli said of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center intended for Route 49 in Bridgeton. "And that's a low number. We think it will be at least double."

The new 23,000-square-foot center will offer local businesses and farmers state-of-the-art food processing equipment, technical support and business advice. Elected officials hope the new center will eventually become an agricultural hub for the state and catalyst for economic development.

"It's been seven years since the concept was developed," director of the Rutgers Food Innovation Center H. Louis Cooperhouse said. "This is about jobs and new business creation and bringing hope to the community."

It is anticipated that the new center will generate about \$5 million annually in sales tax revenue and will create more than \$200 million in cumulative new revenue by 2010, officials said.

Pirolli said the new center's prospects have attracted Israeli company OrganiTech to purchase neighboring property in Bridgeton for \$5,000 per acre for six acres.

"This is a great opportunity for our city," Pirolli said. "I see no negatives to this situation."

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) donated the final \$2 million needed to kick off the groundbreaking, bringing the total cost of the project to \$7.4 million.

"I think this is a good idea because it's going to put the focus back on industry," Cumberland Regional High School student Jared Smith, 17, said. "There's no real place to work here."

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