

Rutgers Food Innovation Center: A Catalyst for Growth to NJ's Food and Agricultural Sector

The Rutgers Food Innovation Center (FIC) is an economic development outreach center of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers University. It is one of 12 business incubators in New Jersey that are recognized, and partially funded, by the New Jersey Commission on Science and Technology, and the only one that is focused on the food and agriculture life sciences sector. The mission of FIC is to stimulate and support sustainable economic growth and prosperity to the food and agricultural industries in the New Jersey region by providing businesses with innovative research, customized practical solutions, resources for business incubation and a trusted source for information and guidance.

Over 600 New Jersey businesses have been assisted by the Rutgers FIC to date, located in every county of the state, from its offices in Bridgeton, Cumberland County. FIC staff originate from industry and are able to share their business and technology expertise with clients, and complement this by utilizing the vast resources that exist at Rutgers University from a wide array of departments and programs on all three of its campus locations. In addition, FIC collaborates with other colleges and universities throughout the state and region and has developed, and is continually broadening, a network of state, national, and international strategic partners and service providers in order to provide the "one stop shopping" that its clients seek. The Center has been recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture as an "Agricultural Innovation Center Demonstration Program," and one of only 10 centers in the country to receive this award. It has also been recognized by international foundations and relief organizations as an effective model for university-driven regional economic development, technology transfer, and poverty alleviation that can be replicated in Africa.

The Center provides solutions to a variety of constituents including:

- farmers and cooperatives desiring to create new businesses based on value-added agricultural products and/or developing new markets for their existing commodities;
- startup food companies evaluating differentiated new concepts in high-growth sectors, and coping with challenges such as technology transfer, financing, regulations, market development, and infrastructure requirements;
- established food companies seeking to access and commercialize new technologies, upgrade quality assurance capabilities, enter new markets, and expand and improve their operations; and
- retail and foodservice establishments seeking to improve their operations and purchase locally grown New Jersey products

Typical assignments vary widely but may include assistance with a client's business plan and market research; product, manufacturing and/or sales strategy; product and process development; guidance with licensing, intellectual property and corporate governance issues; quality assurance and food safety design; support with regulations and compliance issues; workforce training; guidance with private and public funding sources; and business mentoring, entrepreneurship development and networking support.

The Food Innovation Center is in the process of constructing a 23,000 sq. ft. food business incubator facility in Bridgeton that is expected to open during the fall of 2007. This facility will house state-of-the-art, shared-use food processing space, product development and analytical support laboratories, distance learning and educational capabilities, and administrative space for its staff as well as its clients. It is projected that at least 250 different companies will utilize and benefit from the incubator



facility during its first five years of operation. Facility space will be available for rental on a daily basis for companies with an interest in producing from a diverse array of product capabilities, including fresh-cut produce products, beverages and juices, soups, sauces, jams, jellies, cheese, entrees, pies, breads, cookies, seasoning blends, dehydrated vegetables, etc.

In effect, the FIC incubator facility will serve as a:

- Research facility for the evaluation of new technologies, including ingredients targeted at disease management and health promotion, food technologies that retard microbiological spoilage and extend shelf life, and packaging systems that enable a wide array of new product testing;
- Commercialization facility for the testing of new products and processes, including specialty products requiring organic, kosher or other specifications, so that the viability and economics of a new business opportunity can be properly assessed;
- Technology Transfer facility, in which technologies, proprietary processes and patents developed at Rutgers or elsewhere can first be assessed for business potential by FIC staff and its resource network, and then be applied and transferred to appropriate products;
- Business and Technical Services Support facility, in which FIC's technical services capabilities can be provided as a resource to the food and agricultural industry, and to ingredient and equipment suppliers. These services include market research, product and prototype development, package design and development, government regulations and nutritional analysis, consumer research and sensory analysis, microbiology and analytical chemistry, and distance learning and education.

Further information about the Rutgers Food Innovation Center, and its plans to construct a food business incubator facility, can be found on its website at www.foodinnovation.rutgers.edu.