

Penn State Initiative Supports State's Food Processing Industry

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) - A university-wide task force of Penn State faculty and technology-transfer experts is helping to implement the Food Industry Initiative in Pennsylvania, a focused effort to support Pennsylvania's food manufacturing and processing industry.

Coordinated by Penn State's college of Agricultural Sciences, the initiative brings leaders from industry, academia and government together to strengthen connections and address common issues - including workforce training, legislation and regulation, and science and technology - affecting the industry's profitability and viability.

Penn State will create a centralized access point for research, training and development opportunities for Pennsylvania food manufacturing firms, according to Paul Wangsness, senior associate dean in the College of Agricultural Sciences and chair of the initiative's steering committee.

The Food Industry Initiative was formed in response to

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge's "Technology 21 Initiative," which identified six business sectors that could develop family-sustaining, high-technology jobs in the commonwealth. Agribusiness, including food processing and manufacturing, was one of the six sectors selected.

"As many as 3,000 companies are involved in food processing in our state - many of them small or mid-sized," Wangsness said. "These companies can use help with a variety of needs - from research and development to technical consultation. The college is leading a university planning group to develop a centralized access system to Penn State services, as well as to resources beyond Penn State."

"We're not expecting to add new resources initially," he said. "The centralized access system simply will be a mechanism to link food manufacturing companies to existing services. Smaller companies sometimes are unsure about how to approach the university. We are trying to build comfort and communication levels for the food manufacturing sector."

The steering committee is developing a mission statement, operational structure and name for the access point. The committee plans to make its final recommendations to the dean of the college by June 30.

According to Wangsness, a 1999 task force identified 97 areas in the Penn State system with potential to support the needs of the food processing and manufacturing industry, including education, research, technical training/certification, workforce training and product commercialization.

"We were surprised by the richness and range of the services already in place," he said. "There's a real excitement about enhancing the connection between the available services and the companies that can use them the most. Over the next few years, we'll continue developing the access point and defining its services within the university."

In addition to Wangsness, the steering committee includes:

- Theodore Alter, associate dean and director of cooperative extension, College of Agricultural Sciences.

- Robert Beelman, professor of food science, College of Agricultural Sciences.

- David Blandford, department head, agricultural economics and rural sociology, College of Agricultural Sciences.

- Jack Gido, director, PEN-NTAP.

- Michael Green, professor of nutrition and physiology, College of Health and Human Development.

- Arthur Heim, director, Penn State Research Park.

- Patricia Heuser, director of college relations, College of Agricultural Sciences and project director.

- Joseph Irudayaraj, assistant professor of agricultural engineering, College of Agricultural Sciences.

- John Mason Jr., associate dean for graduate studies and research, College of Engineering.

- Stephen McGregor, director of program management, Ben Franklin Technology Partners.

- Edward Mills, associate professor of dairy and animal sci-

ence, College of Agricultural Sciences

- Edward Reutzel, senior associate dean, The Smeal College of Business Administration

- Michelle Rodgers, Capital Region director, Penn State Cooperative Extension.

- Donald Thompson, department head, food science, College of Agricultural Sciences.

- Jack Watson, state program leader for agriculture and natural resources, Penn State Cooperative Extension.

- Richard Wysk, professor of industrial engineering, College of Engineering

- Roy Young, department head, agricultural and biological engineering, College of Agricultural Sciences

- Gregory Ziegler, associate professor of food science and director of the Center for Food Manufacturing, College of Agricultural Sciences

- Barry Zoumas, Alan R. Warehime Professor, agricultural economics and rural sociology, College of Agricultural Sciences

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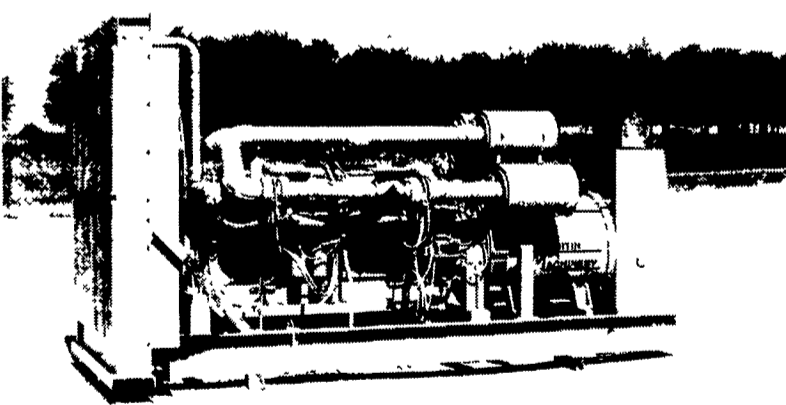


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