Food Processing Innovation Center Committee Report
2017/2018 Progress

Progress between partners and with facilities

In FY 2017/2018 progress was made regarding the facilities for what is now being called the North Carolina Food Innovation Lab.

The business plan for the NC Food Processing Innovation Center were developed and approved in October 2017. This was followed by the finalization of a lease agreement in April 2018 between NC State University (NCSU) and Castle and Cooke for the nearly 15,000 square foot NC Food PIC space to be located at the NC Research Center Core Lab. Preliminary design discussion began between NCSU, the design build team CRB and Castle and Cooke between February and June 2017 in anticipation of a contract between Castle and Cooke and CRB for the design-build of the NC FIL facility. The contract was finalized in July 2018.

In June 2018, the project name officially changed from NC Food PIC to NC Food Innovation Lab (NC FIL). This was done to help distinguish North Carolina's project from similar efforts in other states. Full design-build phase has been initiated for NC FIL as of Aug. 1, 2018. Additionally, the Golden LEAF Foundation's commitment of $2.2M for initial equipment for NC FIL is in now in place, allowing for the procurement of equipment for plant food processing. This is especially important as some of the equipment requires a long lead time before delivery.

Personnel

NCSU College of Agriculture and Life Sciences conducted a successful search for a director, with Dr. William Aimutis being named as the first lab director. Aimutus officially began work July 23, 2018. Aimutis recently served as a research fellow and global director of external innovation for Cargill, Inc. Before that, he held R&D positions at Land O'Lakes, Kerry Ingredients, Protein Technology and Chr. Hansen's Laboratory. Aimutis has been a member of the Institute of Food Technologists since 1976 and was qualified as a Certified Food Scientist in 2013.

Aimutis is in the process of initiating searches for key technical and administrative staff for the NC FIL. Simultaneously, the Department of Food Bioprocessing and Nutrition Science has initiated a search for a Plant Food Engineer (Extension/Research) to be housed at the NCRC and directly support NC FIL and NC Food Manufacturing Initiative goals. This search is underway with anticipation of a January 2019 start date.

Other relevant activities and engagement

Significant engagement has taken place in FY 2017/2018 with both NC based and national/international food industry, with the goals of outlining partnerships both for NC FIL and identifying key opportunities for the broader food manufacturing initiative that would serve to:

(1) Drive the use of NC agricultural products, equipment or food;
(2) Increase the number and economic value of food manufacturing companies in NC; and
(3) Increase employment and private capital investment in food manufacturing in NC.

In the first half of 2018, NC FIL connected with a total of nine North Carolina based companies and 23 national/international companies. These initial connections will help establish the foundation for NC FIL and build on the existing business relationships and efforts of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, as well as the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina to better drive growth of food manufacturing in the state.
Examples of this include:

- Participation in three workshops organized by NCDA&CS and delivered with NCDA&CS and EDPNC for targeted groups of economic development partners throughout the state. The goals of this workshop included:

- Provide good networking opportunities for economic developers to meet with each other and learn more about how the NC Food Innovation Lab can help create jobs and stimulate investment.
- Create better understanding of how they can position their locations to attract food manufacturing and processing businesses.
- Increase opportunities to learn more about the trends that are driving innovation in the food industry
- Give participants an opportunity to ask questions of NCSU, NCDA&CS, EDPNC and Kupperman Location Solutions.

- The recruitment and development of new food industries are stated goals of the FMI. NC FIL facilities and leadership will provide assistance in these endeavors through R&D support and technical guidance. NC FIL also works directly with EDPNC and NCDA&CS in coordinated efforts to foster recruitment of new industry. Coordinated recruitment efforts between NC FIL, EDPNC and NCDA&CS are actively pursuing and advancing this opportunity.
- NCSU in collaboration with NCDA&CS hosted a stakeholder work session in June 2018 to discuss the strategic focus of NC FIL and ideas to maximize activities beneficial for entrepreneurial growth in the NC food sector, with particular focus on rural communities. Eleven companies were present. These were local as well as national/international companies representing the food ingredient, equipment manufacturing and packaged food sectors. Additional insights were received from six more companies that provided feedback separately. This meeting served as the initiation of an industrial working group for the NC FIL, which will aid in the strategic mission to enhance the food manufacturing sector in NC.