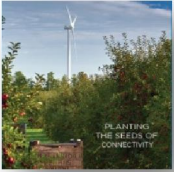


Pillar Updates March, 2018

The West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative (Initiative) program team issues periodic updates about each of the key pillars (implementation, education/incubation, and logistics-Cross Lake Shipping-CLS) as the Initiative evolves through Phase II into Phase III. Questions can be directed to Marty Gerencer, Initiative Co-Director (marty@morseconnections.com) or Dennis Marvin, Pillar Manager-Implementation Communications and Logistics-CLS (dcmarvin@aol.com).



Initiative Communications and Networking: The Initiative team has worked closely with officials from Revel, a Muskegon based public relations firm, to develop a web site that describes the work of the West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative, as well as, be a link to resources to support the food processing sector. The web site is slated to be completed by the end of March, 2018. The Initiative team, led by Co-Director Marty Gerencer, is reaching out to many local and regional stakeholders including food processors, farmers, economic development organizations, foundations, small business forums, and others to engage them in the Initiative.



Initiative Funding Campaign: Thanks to the Consumers Energy Foundation's generous seed funding investment, the Initiative team has been able to implement the "Vision" of expanding and growing the food processing sector in West Michigan. More funding is needed to keep the momentum going from Phase II into Phase III which wraps up in 2020. By that time, we expect to see similar results in job creation and economic growth that was achieved in the Finger Lakes Region of New York within five years of their initiative launch. Their results included a: **17% increase in annual wages; 20% increase in jobs, and a 40% increase in total wages.** The Initiative leadership is in discussion with a number of local and regional private sector companies and philanthropic organizations about supporting the campaign. For more details on how you and your organization can support the Initiative, please contact Marty Gerencer, Co-Director (marty@morseconnections.com).



Food Processing Industrial Park Development: Initiative Co-Director and site consultant John Sisson along with Jonathan Wilson, who coordinates economic development for both Muskegon County and the City of Muskegon, completed evaluation of potential locations within the region for potential development of a food processing industrial park. The process has resulted in an increase in property development activity by both the private and public sector. Over ten sites have been identified as having potential for food processing development. In the meantime, the Initiative will continue to provide support as needed to local economic development and community officials to ensure these sites are "food processing certified." The team also assisted with the identification of property that is suitable for the proposed Food Processing Incubation and Pilot Manufacturing Center (update on page 2).



Education Curriculum Development: The Initiative team, led by Education Pillar Manager Clarence Rudat of Michigan State University and Muskegon Community College, continue to evaluate new training programs to prepare the future workforce for current and potentially new food processing companies that are located within the region. Discussions are being held with food processing companies to determine what type of training will benefit their business requirements to potentially include boot camps and short courses. From this collaboration MSU is developing courses for a two year certificate and Associate Degree program while MCC has a one year certificate program in place to address immediate needs. Evening and weekend classes for employees of local food processing companies who seek additional training are currently being offered in Muskegon with expansion to other locations by request. MSU is developing mobile food processing units that can be used for on-site training. The Initiative's recruitment programs are targeted at reaching high school age students and veterans. Officials are developing direct scholarship and apprenticeship programs.



Food Processing Incubation/Pilot Manufacturing Center: The results from the Initiative's food processing focus groups indicated a need for capacity to test and develop new products without shutting down their existing operations. To address this need, the Initiative team, in conjunction with Michigan State University, is in final discussion with a Muskegon-based developer to establish a food processing incubation and pilot manufacturing center. In addition to product development capacity for existing businesses, the proposed facility will accommodate startup companies that have reached stage two in their development with about 10 to 50 employees and accommodate food and beverage processors (including office space). To enhance the success of its tenants, a 10,000 square foot collaboration station and training center enabling tenants to work with product counselors and other processors as well as offer training to employees. There is a plan for a food marketing resource center that will help food entrepreneurs expand their markets. The Initiative began a campaign to educate 42 kick starter kitchens in the state and another 53 in Chicago and Milwaukee about the new capabilities the proposed center will offer. In the future, there is also potential of incorporating an area for the Healthy Muskegon program for raised vegetable beds, gardens, and a hiking trail through the nature area. The former Muskegon farmer's market site is being considered as the location for this facility.



Cross Lake Shipping/Logistics: The Cross Lake Shipping strategy continues on track to launch during the 2018 shipping season. Officials from Supply Chain Solutions and Eco Ships continue to meet with prospective customers and others to build the base needed to launch the service. They are to meet with the leadership of the MEDC later in March.