

Pillar Updates September 2018

The West Michigan Shoreline Food Processing Initiative (Initiative) program team issues periodic updates about each of the key pillars (infrastructure, education/incubation, and logistics-Cross Lake Shipping-CLS) as the Initiative evolves through Phase II into Phase III. Detailed information is presented during stakeholder briefings. Questions can be directed to Marty Gerencer, Executive Director (marty@morseconnections.com) or Dennis Marvin, Senior Consultant, Programs and Communications (dcmarvin@aol.com).



Communications-Networking: The Initiative team officially launched a Facebook page to enhance its communications and social networking process. As a supporting tool for the Initiative web site launched in April 19, 2018, the Facebook page will primarily be used to share industry trends and major stories directly or indirectly related to the industry and other real time information. The web site also features current local, state, and national food processing industry news items and is updated multiple times through the week. Check out the web site at <https://westmifoodprocessinginitiative.com/>. The Fair Food Network invited the Initiative to be a session panelist at its Michigan Good Food Fund conference October 29 in Detroit. The Initiative will also represent the FARM which was recently announced for development by Muskegon based Core Development. The conference target audience is good food entrepreneurs who are ready to grow their food processing capabilities. The FARM, which was jointly announced by Core Development and the Initiative, received considerable media coverage (see the section on FARM for more details).



Initiative Funding Campaign: In the near future, the Initiative leadership will announce funding confirmation from three organizations. The funding is sufficient to enable the Initiative team to operate its base plan through 2019. The supporting organizations expressed strong interest in the work of the Initiative. In the meantime, the leadership continues to discuss potential funding opportunities with a number of other local and regional private sector companies and philanthropic organizations about supporting the Initiative to enhance the level of support defined in the Initiative's vision. For more details on how you and your organization can support the Initiative, please contact Marty Gerencer, Executive Director (marty@morseconnections.com).



Food Processing Industrial Park Development: Muskegon County/City Economic Development completed a direct mailing to over 100 companies identified using information supplied through Initiative site selection expert John Sisson. The mailing included the general overview brochure, food processing brochure, and information about the FARM. The County/City is also taking a full page advertisement in the MEDC's publication *Mich. Magazine*, which is distributed throughout the country and in targeted international markets. Discussions also continue with potential industrial park developers and potential food processing project investors.



Education Curriculum Development: New training programs to prepare the future workforce for current and potential food processing companies are moving forward. The collaboration between MSU and Food Processors has led to the development of courses for a two-year certificate and Associate Degree program titled Food Processing Technology and Safety. Curriculum for the entire program is in the final stages and the MSU program is in the approval process at this time. MCC has a one-year certificate program in place to address immediate needs with 3 courses developed specifically for food processors. 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 for on-site training and Muskegon is identifying a docking location for these units. Currently, three units are being developed. MSU is looking for partnerships between food processors and food equipment manufacturers to provide students hands-on experiences with the most advanced technology in the industry. To meet the sector's workforce need of 600+ workers in the next three years, the Initiative's recruitment programs are targeted at reaching high school age students, employees in transition, current food related workforce and veterans. Funding is being pursued for a career advising specialist dedicated to Ag and Food Processing in West Michigan with the goal of filling the workforce needs in this sector. Officials are developing direct scholarship, tuition reimbursement and apprenticeship programs in cooperation with processors throughout the state.



Food Processing Incubation/Pilot Manufacturing Center: On July 20, 2018, Muskegon based developer Core Development and the Initiative jointly announced plans to develop the Food Forward Incubator/Manufacturing Facility (FARM) in downtown Muskegon at the former Muskegon Farmer's Market on 731 Yuba Street. The planned food processing facility will offer food-grade industrial space with individual suites ranging from 5,000 sq. ft. to 20,000 sq. ft. The space is designed to offer lease options for entities ranging from fast-growing start-ups to well-established companies in the food industry. The space is suitable for food processing Stage 1 and 2 companies, as well as, those who wish to test new products or processing technologies. The facility is also available to food processing related companies looking for office space such as consultants, research, and laboratory space. The announcement appeared in *M-Live*, the *Grand Rapids Business Journal*, and on *WZZM TV 13*.



Cross Lake Shipping/Logistics: Eco Ships and the Initiative, in association with a Wisconsin based maritime education company, are in discussion with Muskegon Community College and Muskegon Area First to launch a maritime certificate educational program beginning in 2019. The Great Lakes Shipping industry, like many others, are facing deck hand shortages as their current workforce ages and are in need of new employees who are prepared with the basic skills needed to support day-to-day shipping operations on board freighters or other commercial vessels. The Mart Dock, Andrie, and other Muskegon dock owners and operators have previously hosted a career day which has attracted over area high school students to learn more about career opportunities in the Maritime industry (https://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/index.ssf/2017/05/high_school_students_explore_v.html).