

Food Processing Innovation Center Overview

The Southland Development Authority (SDA) is developing a Food Processing Innovation Center (“the Center”) in the Southland, a collection of 45 municipalities in southern Cook and northern Will Counties. This facility will leverage the Southland’s assets and industrial activity to build a hub for food innovation and firm growth. The Center will offer flexible space that can be tailored to each tenant, coupled with shared on-site services performed by Center staff that will provide companies these crucial functions at below-market costs, achieved through economies of scale.

The facility is designed to primarily target two customer segments: (1) small, growing firms emerging from incubators and shared kitchens, and (2) established, mid-sized firms adapting to the rapidly changing food industry. The Center will also attract large firms operating pilot lines or equipment manufacturers showcasing new technologies.

This state-of-the-art facility will help level the playing field between big food companies and small/mid-size food companies by providing an advanced production facility for firms to expand, increase productivity, and pilot new product-lines. The main components of the facility include:

- Approximately 100,000 square feet of production space that can be quickly and flexibility partitioned into dedicated units as small as 2,500 square feet and as large as 30,000 to 40,000 square feet
- Shared services provided by the Center’s operators: (1) warehousing space, including cold and freezer storage; (2) shipping operations for in-bound and out-bound deliveries; and (3) Equipment maintenance technicians for tenants’ processing equipment
- Shared spaces for non-production functions – reception area, worker lockers, conference rooms, co-working space, demonstration kitchens, etc.

The Center will also partner with the SDA and service providers across the region to help offer a broader suite of sophisticated business support services to companies across the region, such as basic food processing skills training (possibly coupled with placement services for training graduates), advanced food processing training, and peer forum groups to promote collaboration among non-competing food companies.

The SDA is currently undertaking several activities to move towards breaking ground on the Center. These include applying for pre-development funds from DCEO, engaging regional and Southland food firms and potential developers and investors. The steps underway as the project moves from concept to full business plan include:

- Socializing the concept with investors
- Identifying and securing contracts with prospective tenants
- Identifying a primary developer