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Gov. Walker: Announces $500,000 workforce training grant to support Great Lakes cheese expansion in Wausau

Posted on Monday, Jun 25, 2018

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 25, 2018
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Governor marks Wisconsin Cheese Day by awarding WEDC grant that will assist company with training its workers in new $95 million cheese packaging plant in Wausau

WAUSAU – Governor Scott Walker today announced that the Great Lakes Cheese Co. has received a $500,000 state grant that will assist the company in training workers for its facility now under construction in Wausau.

“As companies like Great Lake Cheese continue to grow in Wisconsin, it’s imperative that we help those businesses find way to ensure that their workers receive the training needed to compete in our ever-changing economy,” Governor Walker said. “We applaud Great Lakes Cheese for not only investing in our state, but for investing in its workers.”

“As we continue to expand and modernize our operations in Wisconsin, it’s imperative that our workers have the skills and training required to operate the modern state-of-the-art equipment we will utilize in the new Wausau plant,” said Matt Wilkinson, project management director for Great Lakes Cheese. “Employee training is vital not just to the success of Great Lakes Cheese as a local employer,

but for our ongoing commitment to producing delicious world class cheese. We thank the state of Wisconsin for supporting our efforts to continue to develop and enhance the skills of our workforce."

Great Lakes Cheese, which serves the nation's retailers and food service operations as a premier manufacturer and packer of natural and processed bulk, shredded, and sliced cheeses, is building a new $95 million state-of-the art cheese packaging facility at the Wausau West Industrial Park. The 180,000-square-foot facility is expected to open in January 2019.

The company is receiving the $500,000 Workforce Training Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) to train employees on the on new equipment and processes at the new facility. The company is matching the state's investment for training.

In 2017, WEDC awarded the company up to $2 million in state income tax credits for its expansion project, which at the time was a $55 million project expected to create 125 new jobs. However, because of growing demand for its products, Great Lake Cheese is increasing its production capability and capacity earlier than expected and now plans to create 200 jobs at the new plant over the next three years.

The Ohio-based company has four located in Wisconsin with about 1,200 employees, including 230 at its existing facility in Wausau. Those workers will move to the new plant when it opens.

Governor Walker made the announcement as part of the state's second annual Wisconsin Cheese Day, an event that highlights the importance of the cheese industry to the state's economy and to acknowledge the cheesemakers' contributions to the industry. Earlier in the day, Governor Walker visited the Center for Dairy Research at University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Rebecca Kleefisch, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) Secretary Sheila Harsdorf, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) Secretary and CEO Mark R. Hogan and Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett, joined legislators and other state and local officials in visiting 13 cheese companies throughout the state today.

Other sites visited by state officials on Wisconsin Cheese Day included Gehl Foods,

Germantown; Nordic Creamery, Westby; University of Wisconsin-River Falls,; Shullsburg Creamery, Shullsburg; Chalet Cheese Co-op, Monroe; Clock Shadow Creamery, Milwaukee; Emmi Roth, Platteville; Eau Galle Cheese Factory, Durand; and Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery, Ellsworth.

Wisconsin cheesemakers make 27 percent of the nation's cheese, ranking Wisconsin as the top cheese producing state. If Wisconsin were a country, it would rank fourth in the world in overall cheese production, behind the United States, Germany, and France. In 2017, Wisconsin produced 3.37 billion pounds of cheese. Wisconsin cheese producers exported $134 million in cheese products around the world in 2017, a 22 percent increase since 2010.

Wisconsin's nearly 1,200 licensed cheesemakers produce over 600 types, styles and varieties of cheese – nearly double the number of any other state.

With about 8,500 dairy farms throughout the state providing nearly 80,000 jobs, the dairy industry is vital to Wisconsin's economy, culture and heritage.

Governor Walker's proclamations for June Dairy Month and Cheese Day are attached.