



## Food Industry on Menu: Hungry for Growth?

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That's what Rock County 5.0 is asking food processing and technology companies around North America. In April the public-private partnership launched its first targeted outreach campaign to help invite new business into the food processing cluster. In the next week thousands of copies of a marketing packet touting the region's assets to the food industry will be mailed to strategic target markets throughout North America, including areas in Canada and Mexico.

The marketing packet was authored by the Rock County Development Alliance with input from Rock County 5.0's Advisory Council.

"Rock County 5.0 is working to foster and advance the food technology cluster. It's a very structured, incremental and targeted approach," said Rock County Economic Development Director James Otterstein. The next industries to be targeted will include plastics, logistics, advanced manufacturing as well as medical and healthcare. Beloit is a key piece of the food processing marketing campaign. The city is home to some national and international food processing companies such as Kerry Ingredients & Flavours, Hormel, Kettle Foods, Frito-Lay, HB Specialty Foods, Wild Aseptics and Fruit Crown. There are also food-related industries such as Southeastern Container, Broaster, Pepsi Americas and Genencor.

Just over the border in South Beloit there are food processors such as Axiom Foods and Bremner Food Group and food packaging companies such as World Cup and Cup Packaging. Rockton hosts the Taylor Company. North in Janesville is Fontana Flavors, Seneca Foods, MacFarlane Pheasants, Inc. and Gray's Brewery. Northeast in Milton, there is the Cargill Animal Nutrition plant. The DeLong Company in Clinton is a major supplier of food grains domestically and internationally, beginning its operations in Rock County more than 80 years ago.

Food equipment manufacturers, grocery stores and restaurants are prevalent on both sides of the border, and in points in between.

Agriculture is big business in Wisconsin, and food in general tends to be recession proof, Otterstein said. With more consumer demand both for food on the go and healthier products, there is even more demand. The state's largest manufacturing industry is food processing, which is represented by 10,277 firms that generate a payroll of nearly \$2.2 billion and gross annual revenues of approximately \$10 billion.

Rock County also has a bountiful amount of food to draw upon, ranking first in the state for pheasants; second for corn, soybeans, grains, dry beans and peas; third in value of crops including nursery and greenhouses; sixth in sheep and lambs; and seventh in hogs and pigs. Rock County is the ninth largest county in Wisconsin with a population of 160,477 and a labor force of more than 85,000.

There are also infrastructure benefits for food and other industries, such as proximity to larger markets, Interstates 43 and 39/90, a regional airport, a skilled workforce and a population density of 20 million within a five-hour radius.

Rock County 5.0 is a five-year public-private initiative to advance Rock County's economic development vision through a single voice. Support for Rock County 5.0 derives predominately from the private sector, with an investment goal of about \$1 million. Rock County 5.0's strategies include: business retention and expansion, business and investment attraction, small business and entrepreneurship, real estate positioning and workforce profiling.

For more information visit [www.rockcounty5.com](http://www.rockcounty5.com).