

Tempting the food industry

Industrial park could bring in businesses, jobs

By **GARY HUFFENBERGER**

ghuffenberger@wnewsj.com

A 282-acre site off Davids Drive in Wilmington is expected to soon become one of two shovel-ready industrial parks in Ohio for the food processing industry.

Rob Jaehnig, program coordinator of the Center for Innovative Food Technology (CIFT) located at Wilmington College, said Monday the prospect "has serious potential" to attract employers and jobs.

The tract is the same land where a housing development called Parkside South was planned several

years ago targeting DHL Air Park employees because of the proximity to the air park. But the residential development did not come to fruition and eventually the land was sold to a local farmer.

But not until after roadways had already been built and sewer and water lines installed for the planned residential development.

Among those spearheading the industrial park effort are CIFT, Ady International which certifies

sites for the food processing industry, and the Austin Group which engineers, designs and constructs food processing facilities.

The state of Ohio wants three shovel-ready industrial parks certified for food processing, Jaehnig said.

The first site of 150 acres was readied about a year ago in Lima, called

See **INDUSTRIAL PARK**, 3A



Rob Jaehnig, program coordinator of the Center for Innovative Food Technology (CIFT), looks out over a 282-acre site off Davids Drive that's anticipated to become a shovel-ready industrial park for food processing companies.

News Journal photo/Gary Huffenberger

INDUSTRIAL PARK

Continued from 1A

the Gateway Project, which already has a tenant in Kettle Creations, said Jaehnig.

When snags emerged at Defiance, Ohio, for a second location, attention shifted to Wilmington.

In Wilmington's favor are an existing transportation industry, an available workforce, dual-feed utilities at the Davids Drive site, ample water capacity from Caesar Creek Lake to which the city owns water rights, and plenty of excess capacity — about three million gallons per day — at the city's water treatment plant.

"The food industry uses massive amounts of water," said Jaehnig.

Then, when Robert Ady of Ady International and the Austin Group heard that within a two-mile radius there are a four-year college, a community college and a vocational school, their enthusiasm for the Wilmington site increased further.

"This excites them beyond belief," Jaehnig said. He explained that the food industry can have trouble finding enough people who are certified.

All three of the educational institutions have indicated a willingness to start certification or degree programs in the food industry in order to support the project, added Jaehnig.

Once Ady and the Austin Group knew about the educational institutions in addition to the existing infrastructure, Jaehnig said their words were that the

Wilmington location has the makings of a AAA food industry development site — in other words, first-rate.

CIFT and the Clinton County Regional Planning Commission have done a visioning process for the site, and calculate there is space for 12 companies. That can include an eight-acre site with a 25,000 square foot facility up to a 50-acre site with a 250,000 square foot facility, said Jaehnig.

"The estimates are that there's a real potential for this site to build out in 15 years, literally be full in 15 years. With that, that'll give us a range of anywhere between 3,000 to 5,000 jobs," he said.

Is there already an interested tenant?

There's interest from within the baking industry, said Jaehnig, who serves on Wilmington City Council.

He's not the only city official enthusiastic about the potential for a food processing industrial park on the outskirts of Wilmington. So is the mayor.

"It's a very exciting prospect. This is a way of getting in the sights of major corporations," said Wilmington Mayor David Raizk.

When food industry companies consult with Ady International or the Austin Group, "You [the city of Wilmington] end up on the radar screen of major players, so you go to the head of the class," Raizk added.