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Fairview Ag Processing Now Open

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Safflower Technologies International of Fairview, Mont. has a new partner company, Fairview Ag Processing, located on the North Dakota side of the border. A ribbon cutting ceremony held Friday put the spotlight on what economic development officials see as the beginning of an ag processing hub for McKenzie County.

"We've always anticipated and hoped for this area to be the focus of the development of agriculture in our county," said Gene Veeder, executive director of the McKenzie County Job Development Authority. One reason for that hope is the proximity of rail to the plant.

"It's the only rail we have in McKenzie county," said Veeder. "Our vision is to support whatever we can using this corridor and this rail line in McKenzie County."

Now that the plant has officially opened, work is beginning on improvements to the rail adjacent to the plant, which was previously damaged by fire.

All three county commissioners were on hand for the ribbon cutting, along with Tom Rolfstad, representing the Williston Economic Development Partnership. "Really, the big winner in this thing is the farmers. If the farmer wins, we win," he said.

Fairview Ag Processing will serve as the delivery point for the diverse specialty crops grown in the MonDak region. Currently, the plant sources and cleans all of the seed for Busch Ag's malting barley program. It also handles all of the proprietary varieties belonging to Safflower Technologies International (STI), including safflower and sunflower seeds for the birdseed trade, and new edible bean marketing opportunities for human consumption.

Future plans include expansion into proven early season soybeans, pulse crops including peas and lentils, and identity preserved specialty wheats. In addition, the company is excited to be working with area farmers for the custom processing of their small grain planting seeds.

Safflower Technologies International's vision for the Fairview Ag Processing facility includes professional agronomic production services, exclusive genetics, and high valued contracting programs. The exclusive genetic opportunities that STI offers include five new proven proprietary varieties of high yielding safflower. STI is also the regional distributor for Legend Seeds, the region's largest independent family owned seed company offering a complete line of field seeds.

The operation is housed in an elevator previously owned by Specialty Exports. Previously, STI was a customer, but when Specialty Exports company ran into bonding problems late in 2007, STI stepped in, putting together a purchase deal in less than a year.

"We have the right area, the right concept and now, I think we have the right people," said Dale Patten, McKenzie County Bank.

STI President Mike Bergman is the son of Jerry Bergman, long time director of the Sidney Ag Research Center and the research center in Williston. "I grew up following him around, walking through the fields of a prickly plant not many people had ever heard of and even fewer would want to walk in," said Mike. That was safflower. Now STI holds the licensing agreements on several safflower varieties, and STI is marketing and distributing them all over the world. Safflower

Technologies is the entity that will handle the marketing and purchasing of commodities and Fairview Ag Processing will do the handling and processing. "The two companies will co-exist under our ownership and leadership," Mike said. At a time when sugar beet contracts are uncertain in the region, farmers are looking for more alternative crops and these two companies will help provide farmers an outlet for what they grow.

A Grand Opening is planned for Thursday, October, 16. For more details call 406-742-5401.