

New life for Progresso plant: Produce firm may move in

Anthony V. Coppola, Aug. 10, 2017

VINELAND - The city has a potential suitor in place for the shuttered Progresso plant on West Elmer Road.



F&S Produce Company of Rosenhayn is pursuing a move to purchase and upgrade the 500,000-square-foot former home of Progresso. The soup maker's final day of operation here was Aug. 2, a spokeswoman said.

Founded in 1981, F&S supplies fresh-cut and individually quick-frozen produce, along with specialty prepared refrigerated food. According to the company's website, F&S currently operates out of two Rosenhayn facilities totaling 125,000 square feet.

The July 2016 announcement that General Mills [was closing its Vineland Progresso soup plant](#) signaled the eventual loss of 370 jobs for workers at the factory, one of Vineland's largest private employers. Their work was shifted to a plant in Missouri.

F&S currently employs around 380 people. The move to Vineland is expected to create an additional 60 jobs initially.

Vineland Mayor Anthony Fanucci said his administration made it an instant priority to bring a new business to the Progresso location.

He said recruitment of F&S has been in the works for five months.

"This was a tremendous focus of our administration to go after and find an operation that would fill that site," Fanucci told The Daily Journal. "It was extremely important we set our sights on a quality operation and one that we feel will have a long relationship with the city of Vineland."

F&S was approved Tuesday for \$21.8 million in tax credits over a 10-year span under the New Jersey Economic Development Authority's Grow NJ program.

In January, the EDA approved \$28.1 million in tax credits for F&S to expand its facility at 730 Lebanon Road in Rosenhayn. Subsequently, F&S submitted a location change request to accommodate the potential move to Vineland.

"On behalf of our employees and their families, we are pleased that the New Jersey Economic Development (Authority) approved our application to relocate and expand in Vineland," CEO Sam Pipitone said. Although this was one of the final steps in our decision process, and we're still in a due diligence period, we've been impressed now for many months with the welcome we've received from the City of Vineland and Cumberland County."

The location change request submitted to the EDA notes, in terms of production levels, that the Progresso site would save F&S six months when compared to building a new plant. The request also points to the size of the Progresso facility, which leaves room for F&S to consider future expansion without having to build.

According to the EDA application, F&S proposes to use 200,000 square feet at the Progresso site for its operation and lease the remaining 300,000 square feet.

While the hiring of former Progresso employees is not guaranteed, the F&S application does state the move "provides opportunities for workers displaced from layoffs."

"F&S is truly a class operation and we are proud to welcome the company and the new jobs they will provide to the community," Fanucci said. "In addition, their presence in Vineland will further strengthen our nationally recognized food processing sector by engaging supplier and partner companies in the area."

In addition to its processing facility, F&S owns and operates an in-house transportation fleet — Pipco Transportation — and Mid-Eastern Cold Storage, a 60,000-square-foot blast freezing and frozen storage space on North Orchard Road in Vineland.