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New Fruit Plant Will Bring 100 Jobs to Rupert

BY LAURIE WELCH lwelch@magicvalley.com Oct 16, 2013



Southern Idaho representatives join Frulact staff in Portugal to discuss plans to open Frulact's first U.S. processing facility in Rupert, Idaho. From left: Mike Tribe (Rupert), Rita Canelas Pereira, Darr Moon (Rupert), Kenneth Vaughn, Fernando Capa, David Guedes, Nuno Ozorio, Kelly Anthon (Rupert), Jan Rogers (Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization) and Pedro Azevedo.

(Courtesy photo)

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RUPERT - A Portugal-based fruit processing company chose Rupert to house its first U.S. plant.

Frulact Group plans to build a 200,000-square-foot fruit preparation and processing plant south of the Minidoka Irrigation District office.

The plant is slated to break ground this year and open during the fourth quarter of 2014, according to a press release issued by the company and Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization.

“This is historic for Rupert. It’s been many decades since we’ve had a business this size locate in Rupert,” said Kelly Anthon, Rupert city administrator. About 100 employees will be hired when the facility is at full production with more jobs added as growth warrants.

Along with a tax base boost, other effects will likely follow such as new residential growth and possibly other new companies, Anthon said.

“Any community would be thrilled to have this facility,” Anthon said. “It’s beautiful and clean with no odor, and they produce an excellent product.”

Anthon was part of a group that toured the company’s plant in Portugal.

“We are thrilled to build our first U.S. location in Idaho,” Joao Miranda, CEO and co-founder of Frulact, said in the press release. “After looking at locations in Idaho, Utah, Wyoming and Nevada, we selected the city of Rupert because of the sense of their community, and a commitment that Rupert is ready and currently in position to guarantee that Frulact can start immediately with the construction of our factory in order to meet our objectives. ...”

"The city of Rupert is superbly located for the Frulact facility and therefore is ideal to serve our key customers throughout the United States. We look forward to operating in Rupert and getting established in the U.S. production and distribution market," he said.

Family-owned Frulact Group has its headquarters in Maia, Portugal. Founded in 1987, it produces fruit-based preparations for international food

industries with locations in Portugal, France, Morocco and South Africa. Frulact develops custom fruit preparations for food labels in the dairy, beverage (such as juice, nectar and soft drink), ice cream and industrial pastry markets throughout Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Frutlact Group has more than 500 employees, and more than 35 percent have university degrees.

“I had the opportunity to meet with members of Frulact’s senior management team, and I was impressed by their professionalism, knowledge and commitment to excellence – in their company, in their product, and in their partners,” Gov. C.L. “Butch” Otter said in the press release.

Jan Rogers, executive director of Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization, said Rupert stayed competitive against other communities because of the Rupert voters who supported a major wastewater facility upgrade completed in 2012.

“The foresight by voters to improve their wastewater treatment operations played a significant role in Frulact’s decision to select Rupert for their very first American operation,” Rogers said. “That decision by voters and the city of Rupert’s key role in negotiating terms of the deal among all parties was pivotal in attracting this major piece of business.”

The city approved a \$14.2 million bond issue that funded the bulk of a phased wastewater upgrade.

Anthon said that while he visited with people who worked at the company's Portugal facility he was struck by how

happy they appeared and how much they liked working for the company.

“It’s hard to imagine a better fit for the community,” he said.

Rogers said walking into the company’s Portugal plant was like walking into any major U.S. company.

“Everything was very nice and very well maintained,” Rogers said.

The state was proactive in bringing the business to Rupert, Anthon said.

The city will seek grants to help place sewer, water and electrical lines for the plant, he said.

“What a historic impact this project will have for the citizens of Rupert,” Rupert Mayor Michael Brown said in the press release.

“Frulact’s facility here will impact this community in so many positive ways for many years to come. We believe this project will open the door to other industries looking for a great community to build or expand,” Brown said.



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