

Cargill Expanding Seed and Oil Research

PAT FERRIER, The Coloradoan

FORT COLLINS, Colo. (AP) — Inside an array of nondescript greenhouses in Fort Collins, tiny specks of pollen grains are treated to grow into plants that will be cross-pollinated to combine their high-yield and specialty oil traits.

If this genetic match game is successful, oils produced from these plants may one day make their way into the snacks, sweets and other products we eat and cook with every day. More than 40 employees work here, yet the size and scope of their work goes largely unnoticed.

This is Cargill's Specialty Seeds & Oils division, part of one of the oldest privately held food, agriculture, financial, manufacturing and industrial companies.

Inside, workers develop and cultivate seeds and crops that can be turned into stable, heart healthy oils for cooking and eating.

The 30-acre facility is about to start a \$10 million project to grow its footprint in Fort Collins, with a 38,000-square-foot expansion of its greenhouses, seed storage and offices.

The company has been part of Fort Collins' fabric since 1963 when it opened its High Plains wheat breeding program. As eating habits changed, Cargill began the transformation into specialty oils in 1994 and worked with McDonald's in 2002 to develop a new cooking oil to decrease the trans fatty acids in the fast food giant's french fries.

Today, Cargill supplies Culver's and all Disney properties with oils. You'll also find the oils in Stove Top stuffing, Goldfish crackers, Nature Valley, Fiber One and a variety of other products. Cargill researchers are working on the next generation of Clear Valley canola oils, a high-stability oil suitable for cooking with reduced saturates and zero trans fats per serving.

With an eight-year turnaround from research to yield, Cargill's expansion in Fort Collins will reach into the next generation of oils to meet consumer needs including Omega 3 for brain and eye development, said Lorin DeBonte of Cargill Specialty Seeds & Oils.

Cargill is researching ways to extract Omega 3 from land-based plants rather than fish, DeBonte said.

But Cargill's oils, considered specialty crops, compete for land against the more common commodity crops.

"How to manage the genetics to survive in that climate" means Cargill's crop yields

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need to be as robust as commodity crops, DeBonte said. "Otherwise, why would a grower want to grow (our) product rather than the commodity crop? We see that as our competition."

Cargill's Specialty Seeds & Oils has a special relationship with Colorado State University's agriculture program, funding post-doctoral students, paying for employees to get advanced degrees there or footing the bill for international speakers to come to campus.

Cargill donates about \$5,000 a year so the College of Agriculture can bring in researchers so students are exposed to research.

Cargill also announced in late November it would open a 67,000-square-foot steel processing facility in the Great Western Industrial Park in Windsor by the end of this year.

The Windsor town board approved a \$239,000 tax-incentive package that mostly includes rebates on construction permits and fees, said Dathan Dunn, business development manager for Cargill's metals division.

Cargill's Windsor processing plant will be operated by Cargill Metals Supply Chain, a subsidiary that runs hot-rolled steel processing centers and five distribution centers worldwide.

This steel processing facility will be the eighth of its kind for Cargill, with the last one being built in the early 1990s. The company, which has shipped product into the Denver, Northern Colorado and Wyoming area for years, started to look for ways to get its products closer to customers, Dunn said in a telephone interview from Minneapolis.

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