Maryland-Based McCormick Considers Relocation

JONATHAN O'CONNELL, The Washington Post

SPARKS, Md. (AP) — There may be no company that says Maryland like Old Bay Seasoning. The rust-colored blend of herbs and spices has been included in recipes for everything from baked pumpkin seeds to chicken wings and of course, steamed blue crabs.

The question is how big of an ingredient the product will remain in Maryland's economy as its owner, McCormick & Co., considers relocating.

Founded in 1889 as a maker of root beer, flavoring extracts and fruit syrups, McCormick is now a $9.3 billion company with spices and seasonings — Old Bay being the most famous — that sell in more than 110 countries.

McCormick is the sixth-largest company in the state of Maryland, according to Forbes, and in its last fiscal year the company reported $389 million in profits.

For 23 years McCormick has been headquartered in Sparks, Maryland, 20 miles north of Baltimore, and it has three other buildings in nearby Hunt Valley. About 2,400 of its 10,000 employees are located in Maryland, most of them between Baltimore and Pennsylvania.

But the company announced in March that it was considering a relocation of its headquarters that could move it out of state. The idea is driven by a need to combine corporate operations, said spokesman Jim Lynn.

"We want to consolidate about 800 employees who work in four buildings in the Hunt Valley-Sparks areas into one location to maximize facility efficiencies, increase employee collaboration, and take a proactive approach to sustainability, among other reasons," he said in an email.

Lynn said the company is looking for between 300,000 and 350,000 square feet of space. The areas under consideration, according to a June report by the Baltimore Business Journal, are Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware and northern Virginia.

Economic development strategists from other states be forewarned, however, that McCormick's Maryland connections run deep. It has key production facilities in Hunt Valley, including a spice mill and laboratories, and many employees live there as well.

"We want to have a minimum impact on the commute of our employees who primarily live in the area," Lynn said.

Alan D. Wilson, the company chief executive and chairman, is a member of the board of directors at the Greater Baltimore Committee regional business group and

has served on the board of the Maryland Economic Development Commission.

The Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development is in regular contract with the company, said spokeswoman Karen Glenn Hood.

"We absolutely want McCormick to stay in Maryland, there is no question about it," she said. "Maryland has been its home ever since it was founded nearly 150 years ago. It's an iconic company. Everybody knows the name McCormick. It's got the global recognition — even people in China know what Old Bay is."

Glenn Hood said McCormick had not asked anything of the state to this point. The company is uncertain when it will make a decision but it would like to complete the consolidation by 2018.

By then, Old Bay will be close to celebrating its 80th anniversary.

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