ConAgra To Close Damaged Slim Jim Plant

Mike Baker, Associated Press Writer

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — ConAgra Foods Inc. said Wednesday it will close a Slim Jim production facility in North Carolina that was damaged during a deadly explosion last year, cutting hundreds of jobs in North Carolina while adding capacity in Ohio.

The Omaha, Neb.-based food manufacturer said the Garner site will close in late 2011 and production will transition to a facility in Troy, Ohio. The Ohio site will add 190 employees to its current work force of nearly 400.

"We truly value the commitment that our Garner employees and the entire Garner community have shown over the past several months," ConAgra Foods CEO Gary Rodkin said in a statement. "This was an incredibly difficult decision, but a decision that allows us to leverage economies of scale in Troy, which is necessary for the good of our business over the long term."

About 750 people worked at the ConAgra facility in Garner when a June explosion ripped through the building, causing parts of the roof to collapse and killing four people. Contractors had been purging gas lines at the time of the blast, and investigators have since issued nationwide warnings about the practice of clearing pipes indoors.

ConAgra agreed to pay $106,000 for workplace safety violations.

The company has previously announced it would lay off 300 of its employees in North Carolina. It plans to provide severance and job-retraining benefits, will donate the building and land to spur economic development, and it will provide $3 million to help fund a planned community center and market the existing site.

ConAgra plans to add 74,000 square feet and four production lines to the Troy facility to make it the primary Slim Jim meat snack manufacturer.

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