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DETROIT (AP) — Ford Motor Co. says it will add more than 7,000 workers in the U.S. over the next two years, including 750 engineers with expertise in batteries and other advanced technology, as it begins producing several new vehicles.

The company plans to hire 4,000 manufacturing workers this year. Almost half those workers will be at the Louisville Assembly Plant in Kentucky that will make the new Ford Escape starting late this year. It expects to add at least 2,500 new manufacturing jobs in 2012.

The 750 engineers that Ford plans to hire will work on hybrid and electric vehicles.

The company said it is beginning a recruiting effort this week in Detroit and either other cities, including San Jose (California), and Raleigh and Durham (North Carolina).

Ford introduced three future electric and hybrid vehicles Monday at the Detroit auto show, including an electric version of the Ford Focus which will go on sale in the U.S. later this year and hybrid and plug-in hybrid versions of the C-Max minivan which will go on sale in 2012.

Ford said the plug-in hybrid C-Max will be able to go 500 miles (800 kilometers) using a combination of its battery and gas engine, while the hybrid version will get better fuel economy than the hybrid Ford Fusion sedan, which gets 41 miles per gallon (17.5 kilometers per liter). The plug-in hybrid will be able to go longer distances on battery power alone than the regular hybrid, although Ford won't release exact distances yet.

The electric Focus will be Ford's first electric car on the market, although it currently sells an electric version of its Transit Connect van.

Ford didn't say how much the vehicles will cost, but Chairman Bill Ford said they will be "competitive" with other electrics and hybrids on the market. The Nissan Leaf electric car, which went on sale last month, costs \$32,780, but buyers are eligible for a federal tax credit of \$7,500.

"We're doing everything we can to make these vehicles as affordable as possible," President and CEO Alan Mulally said. Adding hybrid and electric systems to established vehicles — instead of selling separate ones, like the Leaf — is one way Ford expects to cut costs.

Bill Ford wouldn't say whether Ford can make a profit on electrics and hybrids, which are more expensive to produce, but said the expense will come down as production increases. Ford eventually expects to sell 5,000 to 10,000 Focus

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electricians annually.

"Ultimately this has to be a business for us or we wouldn't be in it," Bill Ford said.

The company also said it plans to hire 6,500 U.S. manufacturing workers over the next two years as it ramps up production of new vehicles. Ford had previously announced some of the new hires, including the 1,800 workers being hired to make the new Ford Escape at Kentucky's Louisville Assembly Plant starting late this year. Some of the workers will be new to Ford, although some will be come from other U.S. plants where Ford has laid off workers.

Under a 2007 contract, new hires will make around \$14, or half the wages of veteran workers, which will mean significant savings for the company.

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