

Mars To Build \$250M Plant In Kansas

Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

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John Milburn, Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Chocolate maker Mars Inc. said Wednesday it had chosen a site in Topeka for its newest manufacturing plant that will initially bring 200 jobs to northeast Kansas.

Officials with the company, city and state said that the project is the largest single investment in the Topeka economy in the city's history. Mars plans to build a 350,000-square-foot plant south of Forbes Field at a cost of \$250 million in its first phase.

The plant, which will be operated by the Mars Chocolate North America, will be built on new industrial property south of Forbes Field and across from the Heartland Park race track.

Mars officials said the project could eventually create nearly 1,000 direct and indirect jobs in Topeka. Construction is expected to begin in August, with the plant beginning operations in late 2013 making M&M's and Snickers candies.

"The site will be a reflection of our commitment to manufacture our products in the markets where we sell them," said Mike Wittman, Mars Chocolate North America's vice president of supply.

Wittman said the plant was the first new chocolate facility built by Mars in 35 years.

Among the incentives offered to lure the plant include a package from Topeka and Shawnee County governments worth more than \$9 million, including free land for the factory and wind energy generation.

The state of Kansas offered tax incentives and work force training programs to Mars. Gov. Sam Brownback and Commerce Secretary Pat George said Mars would be able to take advantage of new incentives for capital investment that allow firms to expense the purchase of new equipment.

Brownback said he and others involved with the project visited with Mars officials on Tuesday at their New Jersey headquarters. Topeka was one of 89 locations in 13 states Mars was considering for the plant.

"This is a sweet day," Brownback said. "The decision to build this new Mars facility in Topeka demonstrates that Kansas can compete and win in the global business world."

Mars officials declined to say what the wages would be at the plant or how quickly

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additional jobs would be created. Mars is a privately held company with more than 65,000 employees worldwide.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/23/2014 - 11:21pm):

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