

Morton Salt Plans \$7M Plant Upgrade

SOUTH HUTCHINSON, Kan. (AP) — Morton Salt Co. has asked South Hutchinson city authorities for a 10-year tax abatement as it plans to upgrade its salt evaporation plant.

In its application, the company says it wants to invest \$7 million in the renovations to modernize the century-old plant, according to The Hutchinson News. The company also said the project wouldn't add jobs to the plant, which employs about 150 people, but would "help with the long term viability of the facility."

Morton Salt Co. wants a 100 percent property tax abatement for the first two years on a new building that would house equipment, with a graduated 20 percent decline every two years over the decade. The plant would still generate some \$1.23 million in new property taxes for the city, council, USD 309 and the state in that time, according to a cost benefit analysis done by the city.

Approval of the tax abatements doesn't guarantee the investment, according to the company's application, but makes it more likely.

The \$7 million figure does not include the equipment that will go into modernizing the plant, and company officials declined to say how much that investment would amount to, said Denise Lauer, director of communications for Morton Salt, a subsidiary of K+S AG, a Germany-based agricultural chemical and salt conglomerate.

The South Hutchinson plant, which opened in 1899, produces highly pure salt using a steam heat evaporation process, according to the application. The improvements, by replacing obsolete equipment, would significantly reduce the plant's utility usage and its greenhouse gas emissions, benefiting the community, according to the application.

The South Hutchinson City Council has said it will discuss the application at a public hearing Aug. 15. If the council approves the proposal, it would go to the Kansas Board of Tax Appeals for consideration.

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