

State, College To Help Fill Jobs At Yogurt Plant

TWIN FALLS, Idaho (AP) — Representatives with the Idaho Department of Labor and College of Southern Idaho plan to visit the headquarters of New York-based Agro Farma to learn what kind of skills workers will need at a Chobani yogurt plant that will create 400 jobs when it opens sometime next year in Twin Falls.

"It will give us a better sense of what worker requirements will be," CSI Instructional Dean Todd Schwarz told The Times-News (<http://bit.ly/uikvrm>).

The visits are planned for Tuesday and Wednesday.

"We're taking the lead on recruitment and (CSI) will take the lead on training," said Brent Tolman, regional business specialist for the Idaho Department of Labor.

Agro Farma officials announced last month that Twin Falls had been picked as the home for a new \$100 million western manufacturing plant for its Chobani yogurt.

Agro Farma founder and CEO Hamdi Ulukaya said the decision to move to the Magic Valley was tied to the region's milk production capacity and trainable workforce. Idaho is the nation's third leading dairy producer, with the majority of those dairy farms centered outside cities like Twin Falls and Jerome.

The opening of the Chobani plant will have "huge implications for new programs" at CSI, Schwarz said, noting the plant is expected to have technologically advanced equipment and machinery.

He said instructors from the college making the trip to New York are from programs that include manufacturing technology, air conditioning, and refrigeration and heating.

The Twin Falls Department of Labor plans to help schedule interviews with candidates.

"We'll have more information once we return (from New York) and will have that timeline in place," Tolman said.

That means job seekers will need to wait a bit before hiring begins for positions starting at \$14 per hour.

"Be ready, but be patient," Tolman said. "We're not quite at that point yet."

Chobani is currently the nation's top selling Greek yogurt, a thicker style yogurt that has twice the protein of traditional yogurts, all natural ingredients, and hormone-free milk.

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

Source URL (retrieved on 04/27/2015 - 1:36pm):

<http://www.impomag.com/news/2011/12/state-college-help-fill-jobs-yogurt-plant>