



News Release

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NMCC and Maine Quality Centers enter training partnership agreement with Aroostook Starch

Aroostook County - An Aroostook County producer and manufacturer of potato starch will benefit from an education and training partnership with Northern Maine Community College and the Maine Quality Centers program that will both improve operational efficiency and pave the way for future workforce expansion.

The memorandum of agreement signed December 13 at Fort Fairfield-based Aroostook Starch, by officials from all three organizations, calls for NMCC, in collaboration with the Maine Quality Centers, to provide education and training for as many as 26 Aroostook Starch employees over an 18-month period, beginning in January 2007. The contract work represents a joint initiative by the College and Quality Centers program representing a \$33,600 value toward the workforce development and expansion of the Fort Fairfield enterprise.

Specifically, the understanding forges a partnership between Aroostook Starch and NMCC, whereby the continuing education division of the College will facilitate training for company employees in various areas identified as critical to the company's growth. Examples of such training modules include sessions in high pressure boiler training, forklift operation, Microsoft Office computer skills, good manufacturing practices, supervisory training, and other topics including safety practices and programmable control systems in use at the plant.

"This grant is essential to Aroostook Starch. It will not only help train existing and potential new employees, but more importantly help us to diversify the skills of our employees and, as a result, improve our efficiency," said Doug Clifford, plant manager. We currently have areas of our production that rely solely on the knowledge and expertise of a single employee. If that individual calls in sick or takes time away from work, we have to shut down that area of operation. After completion of our training program with NMCC and the Maine Quality Centers, that will no longer be the case."

Aroostook Starch was officially re-opened on July 5 of this year by a new management company, Starch Partners, LLC. This after it sat idle for nine months following a plant-wide layoff by the former owners due to soft market conditions last September. Just over a year later, the company is looking ahead to adding to its current 16 employees.

“Among the benefits of this training program is that it will allow us the opportunity to hire new employees should market conditions warrant further expansion. We currently have good, solid contracts and should these continue and we negotiate additional work, we could see growth of up to a total of 26 employees,” said Clifford.

Working in partnership with companies like Aroostook Starch to meet the workforce development needs of the region is at the very core of Northern Maine Community College’s mission, and, according to President Timothy Crowley, is an area on which the institution has placed a great deal of emphasis as it moves forward.

“We have a long history of working hand and hand with area businesses, large and small. It is critical to the economic vitality and development of the region that we not only be responsive, but respond quickly to the needs of the employers in our region. We do this every day through both our continuing education division, as well as our academic programs. Our faculty works closely with business and industry professionals from throughout northern Maine and beyond to ensure we offer quality instructional programs that meet the existing and emerging needs of the workplace,” said Crowley. “We will not only continue to work in that direction, but, moreover, we will collaborate with economic development organizations throughout our region to explore areas where we can initiate workforce development and academic programs to assist in efforts to attract new business ventures to Aroostook County.”

A key partner in NMCC workforce development efforts over the past decade has been the Maine Quality Centers program, an economic development initiative of the Maine Community College System. The Quality Centers provide job-specific workforce training for new and expanding businesses, and new employment and career advancement opportunities for Maine people. As is the case with the Aroostook Starch project, customized training is provided at no cost to either the businesses or the trainees.

“Providing customized training and educational services to help businesses compete is an important part of a Community College’s mission. Maine Quality Centers is just one tool that NMCC has to offer local workers and businesses to strengthen Aroostook County’s economy,” said James McGowan, state director of the Maine Quality Centers. “We are very pleased to partner with Aroostook Starch and NMCC to support this training and we look forward to the results.”

Since the Maine Quality Centers began, 198 expanding Maine businesses have been served by the program creating 10,729 new jobs statewide.

In Aroostook County, since the first joint NMCC/Maine Quality Centers program was initiated in 1997, 20 businesses have benefited from training partnership agreements, totaling an investment of more than \$1.5 million dollars in the region’s economy and just over 1,000 new hires.

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Above: James McGowan, state director of Maine Quality Centers, Timothy Crowley, president of Northern Maine Community College, and Doug Clifford, plant manager of Aroostook Starch in Fort Fairfield, sign an agreement on Wednesday, December 13, establishing education and training partnerships between the three entities.