

Settlement Benefits Moultrie and National Beef



At the National Beef grand opening in Moultrie (l-r): Bill Gandy, director, U.S. Case Ready Plants, National Beef; Marla Lowe, director, southern operations, Quick Start; and Steve Fleming, plant manager, National Beef.

The first manufacturer to benefit from the tobacco-settlement money administered through the OneGeorgia Authority is a subsidiary of the giant cooperative Farmland called National Beef. Last year National Beef opened a meat packaging plant in Moultrie, and Quick Start provided pre-employment and technical job-specific training, and developed work aids.

Laura Meadows, now commissioner for the Department of Community Affairs, was executive director of One-Georgia, which was charged with building economic capacity in rural areas of the state at the time of the Farmland decision to come to Moultrie. Meadows explains that one third of the tobacco-settlement funds is earmarked to help create jobs and diversify the economy in distressed areas.

Farmland, which is comprised of 1,700 local cooperatives representing 600,000 independent family farms in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, chose the Georgia site because of local and state support for bringing viable employment to a rural area of Georgia. Farmland is the largest farmer-owned cooperative in North America.

Steve Fleming, the plant's manager, explains that the Moultrie facility receives cuts of meat from Farmland in Kansas and then prepares and packages

the meat into smaller quantities for sale in retail stores across the South.

Headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., Farmland National Beef has sales in all 50 states and in 60 countries around the world. With offices in Argentina, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and Switzerland, to name a few, the company has a presence across the globe.

The company started in 1929 as Union Oil Co. when six farmer-owned cooperatives joined forces to buy petroleum products. As the 20th century progressed, the group became a powerful force in agribusiness. In the early 1990s, it evolved into Farmland Food and expanded its emphasis on pork to include beef and grains.

Farmland products can be found in grocery stores across the United States. Its main outlets in Georgia include Super Target, Wal-Mart Supercenters, Bruno's, and Piggly Wiggly.

In addition to processing pork, beef, and catfish, Farmland has business lines in crop production, livestock feeds, petroleum, and grain processing; an extensive delivery system of rail cars, trucks, and trailers; and interests in dry cargo barges and ocean-going vessels. It lives up to its claim as a "farm-to-table global agribusiness company." Farmland is one of the top 200 companies on the Fortune 500 list. **QS**



Darrell Moore, president of Moultrie's Chamber of Commerce and director of the Development Authority, describes National Beef's decision to come to Moultrie as a "storybook example" of economic development.

"Everyone really pulled together on this one, from the governor's office, to the Rural Development Council, to OneGeorgia, to the Georgia Department of Labor, to the Department of Industry, Trade & Tourism and, of course, to Quick Start. We have been extremely pleased and are proud to have National Beef doing business here," says Moore.

The meat packagers were impressed with what Georgia had to offer and found Moultrie a willing host. They were able to use an existing building and create a first-class facility that will affect the whole area positively. Counties that worked together to bring National Beef to Moultrie, and who will provide its employee pool, include Brooks, Colquitt, Grady, Mitchell, and Thomas. All of these have been strong agricultural counties traditionally, but now a diverse industry base is helping their economies as well.

"We know how good Quick Start is and we're always bragging on it," says Moore, "but when the National Beef people showed their training plans to fellow management at their Pennsylvania facility, which happened to be opening about the same time, they realized this was really a unique and first-rate training tool unlike any that other states have to offer."