

Castleberry expands to bring new jobs

Castleberry expands to bring new jobs

By **Adrian Burns** | *Staff Writer*

Wednesday, July 13, 2005

After being purchased late last year, an Augusta food producer is poised for major growth.

Castleberry/Snow's Brands Inc. will add as many as 200 jobs this year because of two major additions at the company, which makes canned barbecue and stew at its 15th Street factory.

Castleberry was purchased in December by Bumble Bee Foods, a subsidiary of the Toronto-based Connors Brothers Income Fund.

"One of the greatest things that this marriage has brought is increasing technological capabilities from a production standpoint and a lot of synergies that we have been able to realize," Castleberry spokesman David Melbourne said.

A \$9 million deal with Kellogg Co. to produce imitation meat products is expected to create 66 new jobs at the Augusta plant, while the relocation of a Bumble Bee chicken processing plant in Alabama will create about 120 jobs and bring new resealable pouch packaging to the cannery.

Connors and Bumble Bee might also make additional investments in the facility later this year.

"Other initiatives are under way to consolidate and improve distribution services," Connors spokesman John Stiker said, declining to elaborate.

Local economic development officials helped the company fund the expansions.

A \$302,835 OneGeorgia grant was issued in January for infrastructure development and the construction of a rail spur, which laid the groundwork for expanding the facility and helped lock in the Kellogg deal.

"What Castleberry said was, 'We're spending millions of dollars to create these jobs; can the government help us with infrastructure?'" said David Shellhorse, an economic and community development specialist with the CSRA Regional Development Center, who wrote the company's OneGeorgia application.

Last month, Connors Brothers made a decision to move about 120 jobs from an Athens, Ala., plant to Augusta.

A 15,000-square-foot addition to the Castleberry plant is under construction to make room for the new production, and it is expected to be complete by September, Mr. Stiker said.

The Alabama factory made chicken products similar to what is already produced in Augusta, but it also had a high-tech line of pouch-packaging equipment that will come as part of the move, he said.

Reach Adrian Burns at (706) 823-3352 or adrian.burns@augustachronicle.com

The Impact:

After being acquired by Connors Brothers/Bumble Bee Foods, Castleberry/Snow's Brands Inc.'s 15th Street factory will increase its work force by as many as 200 jobs.

From the Wednesday, July 13, 2005 printed edition of the Augusta Chronicle