

# A \$490,000 boost for agri-food venture centre

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BRIGHTON INDEPENDENT

By John Campbell

**News - Colborne** - The provincial government is investing \$490,000 in the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre being built in Colborne's industrial park.

Northumberland-Quinte West MPP Lou Rinaldi made the announcement recently at the centre with county council and staff members in attendance.

The money will be used to further develop the niche food processing facility that is designed to accommodate small batch processing, and the packaging and storing of fruits and vegetables.

Business support services will also be provided on-site.

Rinaldi said his government is assisting in the \$1.2-million project through the Local Food Fund it set up to enhance agriculture and food processing in the province by distributing \$40 million a year.

It's "a fabulous investment [and] truly is appreciated," Warden Linda Thompson said. "It means a great deal to the agricultural community, not only here in Northumberland but in the whole region, from Kawartha Lakes all the way through to Frontenac County," Thompson said "a considerable amount of work and effort went into making this happen, [which] people have been working on ... for over eight years," and it's involved many different partners, locally, regionally and provincially.

The funding "supports the largest component of our economic base in Northumberland County, and that truly is critical," she said.

"The possibilities are limitless," Cramahe Township Mayor Marc Coombs said, citing the potential the centre has to create employment, have an impact on new business start-ups, and bring recognition to Cramahe Township, the county and the region.

It's "a critical piece of infrastructure that creates an opportunity to grow crops that provide second source

farm income," he said.

Coombs also pointed out that the 15,000-square-foot centre is developing relationships with post-secondary institutions such as Loyalist and Durham that will lead to opportunities "for youth engagement and employment and small business development—all of which means jobs."

Placing the centre in Colborne's industrial park "is key to what will be our agricultural future," he said.

"It's a real plus for Northumberland," said Dan Borowec, the county's director of economic development, who noted the centre is the first of its kind in the province.

The centre will rent out space and use of its equipment to cook, chill, freeze, package and label on a cost-recovery basis. The rates have yet to be set but there have been "a lot of inquiries" with close to 100 people having visited the site, Joe Mullin, the facility's operations manager, said.

The county is paying \$90,000 a year to lease the building from REAL-FLEX Business Parks

The centre will open for business sometime in November, later than expected because "Mother Nature put us four months behind, [but] a soft start may not be all that bad," Mullin said, when "we're bringing in brand new equipment" and new employees.

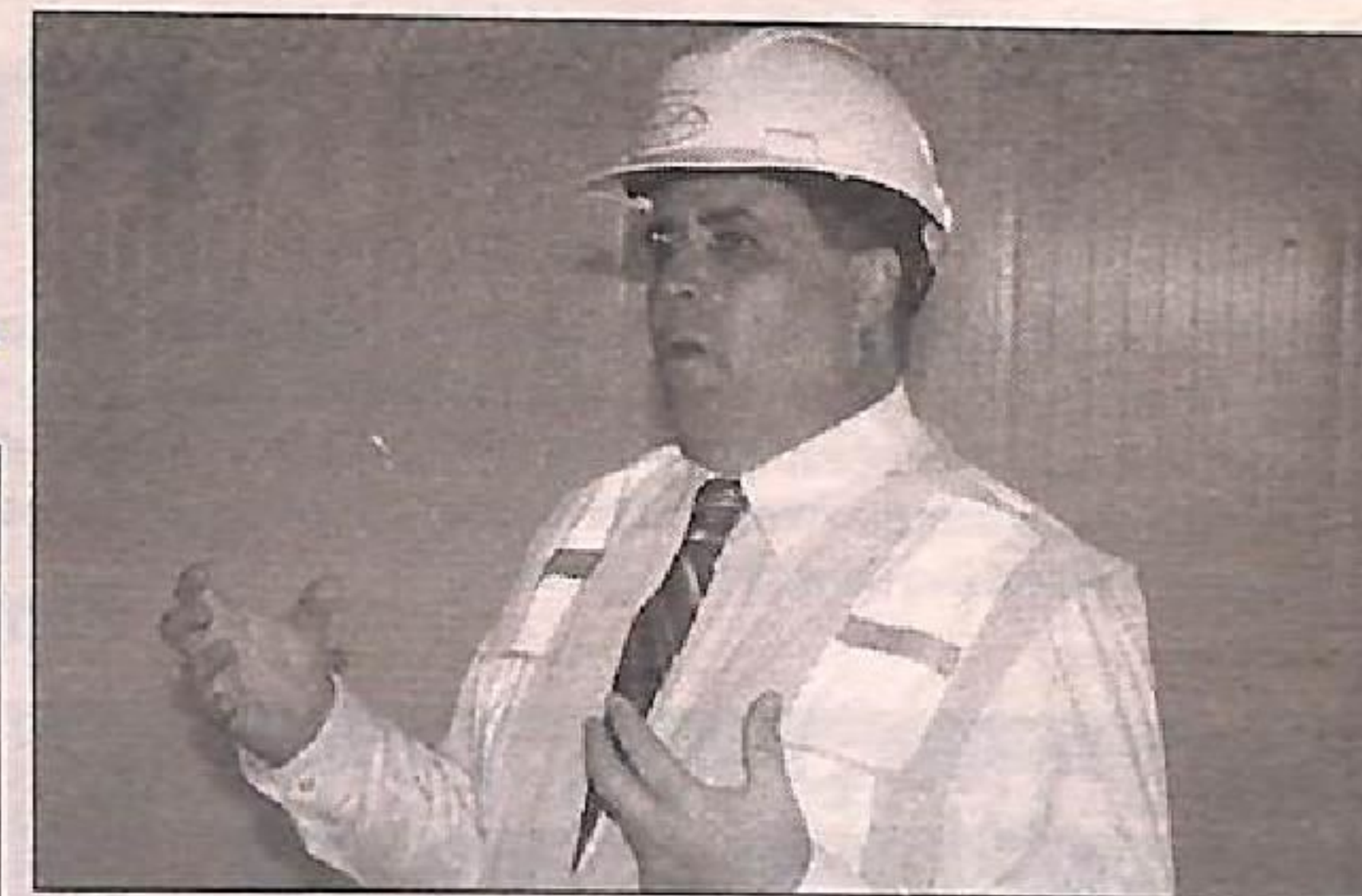
In an interview, Borowec said the funding gives Northumberland "a bit broader expanse of equipment possibilities to maybe do more." He said one of the biggest challenges the county has faced is "to determine which equipment to actually obtain, to get the maximum amount of use ... so that it helps the final tally."

Borowec said "the opportunities for new crop development is huge," giving hops as an example farmers might choose to grow to support local micro-breweries.

"It's very much groundbreaking."



Northumberland-Quinte West MPP Lou Rinaldi announced recently the provincial government is providing \$490,000 to the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre being built in Colborne's industrial park. The province is committing to promoting local food and "the way of the future is to enhance small business in rural Ontario," he said. Photo: John Campbell



Joe Mullin, operations manager at the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre, led a tour of the facility, explaining the various services that will be provided after the centre opens sometime in November. Photo: John Campbell

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