

From the Atlanta Business Chronicle

[:http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/print-edition/2013/04/19/uga-to-build-55m-food-rd-center-in.html](http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/print-edition/2013/04/19/uga-to-build-55m-food-rd-center-in.html)

UGA to build \$5.5M food R&D center in Griffin

SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: Apr 19, 2013, 6:00am EDT



[Dave Williams](#)

Staff Writer- *Atlanta Business Chronicle*

Georgia agricultural leaders are looking to a new research and development center south of Atlanta to lift the state's food processing industry to the same prominence already enjoyed by farming.

The University of Georgia is expected to issue a request for proposals this spring for construction of a \$5.5 million Food Product Innovation and Commercialization (FoodPIC) Center on UGA's Griffin campus. The 10,500-square-foot facility is being funded jointly by UGA, the state and the local development authority.

"Agriculture is still the largest industry in the state and the fastest-growing," said [Scott Angle](#), dean of UGA's College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. "Our downfall is we ship a lot of our raw products out of state for processing. ... All that value is being lost."

The project stems from a UGA study that concluded Georgia's food processing industry has strong potential but lacks a central location where industry and higher education can join forces to create and develop new products and processes. The state-of-the art R&D center will serve as a business incubator for entrepreneurs needing access to equipment and expertise.

"When a company has an idea but doesn't know how to turn it into something that can go on the grocery store shelves, they can come to us and turn it into something that can make money," Angle said.

The study also found that food processing workers in Georgia earned an average of \$932 a week in 2010, substantially higher than the national average for the industry of \$779.

The R&D center is expected to create more than 800 food processing jobs in Georgia during its first decade, according to the study, and help generate \$92 million in additional revenue for the state's food industry.

"We'll have a core faculty here to carry the program forward," said [Dick Phillips](#), the center's director. "But the real impact is to generate jobs out in the state."

Some of those jobs could end up in the same neighborhood. Phillips said that's why the Griffin-Spalding County Development Authority contributed \$1 million to the project.

"We just built a new industrial park on Georgia 16 where they're looking to put in clean industries," he said. "The food industry fits in quite well with that."

While the building will be new, the FoodPIC Center has operated for several years on the Griffin campus.

Among other projects, the center has provided industry-supported research on peanut chips, healthier fried foods, and antioxidants from Georgia crops such as blueberries and peanuts.

Phillips said the new center will let the program accomplish much more.

"When you're working with industrial-type projects, you need to have a scale that approaches the industry itself," he said. "This will at least triple or quadruple the space we have."

The new R&D center will be blessed with a lack of competition. There are no similar facilities in the Southeast.

"When people talk about Silicon Valley, they usually think of computer and software technology," said Georgia Rep. [David Knight](#), R-Griffin. "The FoodPIC Center has the springboard potential to launch a Silicon Valley-like attraction for food businesses and opportunities."

The center is due to be completed by May 2015.

Dave Williams covers Government