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**EDUCATION  
& CAREERS**



The new Food Technology Center at UGA-Griffin provides about three times the space for food development than researchers had before.

**STORY AND PHOTOS  
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**A**midst the hype surrounding the state-of-the-art Food Technology Center that officially opened its doors on the University of Georgia Griffin Campus on Jan. 30, it's easy to forget that food technology research has been conducted on the local UGA campus all along.

In fact, Dr. J.G. Woodroof, who is often referred to as the "father of food science," essentially started food technology in the 1930s at Griffin's UGA Experiment Station, according to Dick Phillips, former FoodPIC director and professor emeritus.

And yet, due to an increasing demand in the field of food development, the new building — more commonly referred to as the Food Product Innovation and Commercialization Center, or simply FoodPIC — provides three times more space than the old facility.

The additional space, along with more equipment at their disposal, allows researchers to make larger batches of food and, thus, helps entrepreneurs to go further in the journey to success, said FoodPIC Director Kirk Kealey.

"We give entrepreneurs the support from an equipment standpoint. We give them a launching pad," said Kealey, adding that prior to developing foods, scientists make sure that the product is safe, legal and doable. "We try to tell people right away if (their ideas are) against the laws of science."

Although UGA food researchers regularly visit shows, conventions and expos to present innovative food products — the FoodPic has recently developed blueberry wine and carbonated yogurt — the work within the new facility focuses on turning ideas into physical prototypes, not the long-term production or packaging of food items.

Yet even within this scope, the new Food Technology Center is now better equipped than it was before.

"Ideally, what we have



At the conclusion of the FoodPIC's dedication ceremony on Jan. 30, guests were invited to take a tour through the new facility.



The ribbon-cutting at the end of the dedication ceremony symbolized the official opening of the \$7.4 million state-of-the-art building.



The groundbreaking of UGA-Griffin's FoodPIC took place in October 2014.



now is a place where we can help people scale up their products," said Kealey. "If they've gone beyond the kitchen and need help to make more product in larger batches, we can now help them much more efficiently than we could last year."

While the FoodPIC's top priority is not to make profits, it does impose a fee on entrepreneurs — who typically come from the metro Atlanta and South Georgia areas — for its services.

The facility itself allows entrepreneurs to develop their own food, or have it developed by UGA researchers, and retreat to a conference room to discuss the feasibility of the product. Kealey, who joined UGA-Griffin as the new FoodPIC director on April 1, 2015, said a crucial component for the success of a food product is its passing of a shelf-life study to determine how long a product stays good wherever it may eventually be offered to consumers.

"You have to meet the need of the customer," said Kealey. "I'm hoping we got the message out, but I invite the community to come by any time."

UGA President Jere Morehead, who attended both the facility's groundbreaking in October 2014 as well as its dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremonies on Jan. 30, has stated that he expects the Food Technology Center to play an important role in improving the local and area economy.

"The (FoodPIC) is an outstanding example of the University of Georgia using its resources to help strengthen our state's economy," he said. "We are grateful for the support we have received for the new Food Technology Center, and we are excited to expand the reach of FoodPIC within the global food industry."

The 14,500-square-foot Food Technology Center has been in the making for about 15 years and came with a price tag of \$7.4 million. Almost half of that amount came from the state

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