Northwest Food Processing Innovation and Education Center

The University of Idaho, acting as the management agent for the Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES), has signed a memorandum of understanding with Food Northwest (formerly the Northwest Food Processors Association) to form the virtual Northwest Food Processing Innovation and Education Center.

According to the United Nations, as a result of global population growth and an increase in the global standard of living, demand for food production will double by 2050. This increase is expected to come without a corresponding hike in available water and energy. New and unique production processes and methods, along with a well-trained workforce to accommodate the application of these techniques and methods, will be required to meet these demands.

The Northwest Food Processing Innovation and Education Center’s mission is to provide transformative technologies for water and energy conservation, new food processing methods, policy decision analysis and effectively help provide an education program for workforce development.

The center will foster relationships between academic institutions, food processing companies, and national labs in the Northwest for developing technology and education programs related to the food processing industry. A major goal for this public-private center is to emulate the successes of existing centers — such as those related to the photonics industry — where new and advanced technologies have been developed and have ultimately transformed the industry.

Industry partners involved in the center will come primarily from members of Food Northwest, food processing suppliers and other food processing companies in the Northwest. The virtual center will provide a forum for exchange of technical and scientific information about key technical issues plaguing the industry, identification of key social and ecological issues confronting sustainability of the industry, cooperation on education and outreach, and the ability to help identify transformative research for the future.

The center will provide the following basic functions to support the food processing industry:

1. Research and development on energy and water conservation, including water recycling and other related research areas.
2. Technology transfer and economic development of results from the center’s research and development.
3. Training and assistance in the implementation of developed technology.
4. Prototype testing of developed technology at on-site plant locations.
5. Education programs taught at plant sites, along with focused symposia, workshops and conferences.
6. Post-secondary education classes involving vocational schools, community colleges and universities.
7. A clearinghouse for information on new technologies.
8. One-on-one consulting on energy and water and related issues.

The center will be managed for CAES by the University of Idaho’s Office of Research and Economic Development. Both a scientific committee and an industrial advisory board will be assembled to work with the center director on technical and educational matters pertaining to the food processing industry. The two groups will closely interact to identify strategic technical and education needs for the industry.