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New plant to be done in a year

By Edward Munger Jr.

Beech-Nut starts countdown to completion



Construction continues Tuesday on the Hero/Beech-Nut baby food factory on Route 5S in the town of Florida.

FLORIDA — Representatives of Hero/Beech-Nut on Tuesday marked the start of a one-year countdown to completion of the new baby food manufacturing facility in the Florida Business Park.

The company began work in May on the 550,000-square-foot plant on roughly 83 acres just east of the Target distribution facility.

Part of the main structure's steel skeleton is visible from the highway, but earthen berms shield from view a massive construction operation expected to be ongoing for the next 364 days.



Hero/Beech-Nut officials offered media outlets a tour Tuesday of the construction site for its new baby food production plant on Route 5S in the town of Florida.

[Watch Video>](#)

"We are really excited," Hero/Beech-Nut CEO Christoph Rudolf said during a guided tour of the site company officials said will house the most environmentally friendly infant food nutrition plant in the United States.

Despite lost time due to rainfall and the regulatory process, Rudolf said the Georgia-based project management company, The Facility Group, has the work proceeding on schedule and on budget.

The development created roughly 400 construction jobs and, despite the timetable, Rudolf said there are no compromises on safety and nobody has been injured working on the site.

Construction workers buzzed about the grounds working on various aspects of the building, which Facility Group Program Manager Jim Ivey said is being constructed from east to west.

The concrete foundation is being poured between 4 and 5 feet deep. Once dry enough, steel framing being fabricated off-site is fitted in place and bolted together. Ivey said crews expect to get the entire building frame and roof up before the winter arrives.

Bulldozers and backhoes rolled about the grounds Tuesday moving equipment and dirt, surrounded by hundreds of sections of piping, several construction trailers and strings of fuse being used to blast shelves of rock underlying much of the site.

Ivey said crews have been blasting for three months.

"We have lots of rock," Ivey said.

Hero/Beech-Nut Vice President of Business Development Edouard Feller marveled how the site earlier this year consisted of little more than grass.

"It was a greenfield and it is extraordinary to see where we are today," Feller said.

The company is working toward achieving certification from the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

Under the LEED program, companies work to achieve a high level of energy efficiency by making use of natural light, reducing water consumption, insulating their facilities and striving for reduced waste and lower greenhouse emissions,

according to the council's Web site.

To that end, designers eliminated ideas for a big green lawn in front of the facility — simply watering the grass is seen as a waste of water.

Two large ponds were developed on the site to collect runoff from the construction work.

Ivey said the drainage itself is monitored on a daily basis to make sure no contaminants are flowing into the environment.

Ivey said The Facility Group considers a clean work site to be an essential element of safety and good construction. Unlike typical building projects, there wasn't a used coffee cup or other litter visible on the grounds Tuesday.

Rudolf remarked that Hero/Beech-Nut is among few companies developing in today's shaky economic environment, but the company has its eyes on a growing segment of the U.S. population expected to maintain demand for their products — infants.

Rudolf said there are about 4 million babies born in the United States each year, a figure growing 0.5 percent to 1 percent a year.

The company's products are now found in 75 percent of food retailers in the country.

"Beech-Nut has continued to grow," Rudolf said.