# County hopes wastewater treatment facility attracts food processors

**Adams County officials hope a new industrial wastewater treatment plant and water reuse facility will lead to recruiting several niche food processing companies.**
Matthew Weaver

Published on May 17, 2018



*Consultant John Boyd Jr. and Port of Othello executive director Chris Faix at the port's Bruce Industrial Park, where they hope to recruit niche food processing companies drawn by a planned industrial wastewater treatment and water reuse plant.*

OTHELLO, Wash. — Adams County and the Port of Othello are building an industrial wastewater treatment and water reuse facility as a first step to recruiting niche food processors and diversifying the region's crops.

The county wants to recruit companies that produce beverages, craft sodas, health foods or nutraceuticals.

"In economic development, everybody really wants the big win," said Stephen McFadden, county economic development director. "What we really want is a handful of small to mid-sized wins that create diverse food processing here."

Ideally, McFadden would like to find four companies that each employ 50 to 100 people.

"That would be the massive victory," he said. "You would have four companies doing completely different things. Nobody's walking over the top of the other, and we've really also created farm opportunities for our irrigated ground around niche and specialty crops."

The port and Adams County will build the plant in the port's Bruce Industrial Park. It was a top need cited by food processors, McFadden said.

A feasibility study found that a 3.4 million-gallon-per-day facility with reverse osmosis would make 70-80 percent of treated water available to processors.

The facility would be 40 to 70 acres, McFadden said.

The county will hire an engineering firm to advocate for the port and county. A request for quotations will go out in the next few months, McFadden said.

Princeton, N.J.-based site selection firm The Boyd Co., studied industries the region was likely to recruit, including food processing for Othello and a distribution logistics fulfillment warehousing for Ritzville.

Land costs are $27,000 per acre at the Othello port and $33,500 per acre at Ritzville, compared to roughly $197,000 in San Bernardino. Calif., $292,000 in Seattle and $319,000 in Los Angeles, location consultant John Boyd Jr. said. "That's some of the most competitive land and utility costs you'll find anywhere," Boyd said.

Othello is the lowest-cost market in the nation for food processing and Ritzville is the second-lowest cost city in the U.S. for distribution. The lowest-cost market is Chesterfield, Va., he said.

Boyd pointed to Interstate 90 and Highway 395 access.

"Adams County is uniquely linked to the global marketplace, which is rare for a market that has such a low-cost profile," he said.

"We are the best-kept secret in Washington state," McFadden said.

Population in Othello has grown 10 percent over the last 10 years, while it has decreased in Ritzville, Lind and Washtucna, McFadden said.

"Wheat will always be our history and our heritage, but we need to add some additional diversity to create new jobs, new investments and get new families into town and new kids enrolled in school," he said.

Othello already has two of the world's largest potato processors and a Netherlands-based company that makes fruit and vegetable concentrates and purees, McFadden said.

McFadden said the county is not recruiting new potato processors.

"We have two flagship stores here, we love what they do, they provide 1,000 jobs here," he said of the potato processors. "It's a rotational crop, so those irrigated circles are available to do other things."

The wastewater treatment and reuse plant will cost an estimated $50 million to $60 million. The county must complete the cost-estimate phase before seeking state and federal funding. McFadden expects a 1.5 year timeline to get the data. He hopes the facility is built in three years, with several companies breaking ground, under construction or ready to go.