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Construction progresses on aquaculture company site

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By Jessica Tuggle

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FELLSMERE -- A barn raising is happening in Fellsmere, but it's not for the cattle of yesteryear or the elephants of today.

The 180,000 square foot barn will house farm-raised shrimp by Florida Organic Aquaculture, a new company that is expected to hire between 60 to 70 people over the next three years to oversee and manage the growth and harvest of sushi-grade colossal shrimp, oysters and samphire, a naturally salty organic vegetable. The company's official groundbreaking ceremony was held on April 29.

Cliff Morris, CEO of Florida Organic Aquaculture, said the aquaculture farm has been in the works for about four years and seeing it come to fruition is immensely satisfying.

As a location, Fellsmere is strategically located inside the company's South Florida market, which stretches from the Tampa area, east to Daytona and south to Miami, Mr. Morris said.

"And there is an abundant source of labor close by. We were pleasantly surprised at the quality of the labor force, many people are multi-skilled and can do different tasks," he said.

The support of Fellsmere city officials and officials at the county level have been extremely encouraging and have a lot to do with Florida Organic Aquaculture choosing Fellsmere for this venture, Mr. Morris said.

The administrative offices for the company are in Palm Beach County, but the Fellsmere site will have offices as well. The company's projects are financed by foreign investors and federal grants.

The plan is for the Fellsmere site to eventually have three large barns to raise shrimp, laboratories to monitor the health and growth of the species, as well as other organic aquaculture produced by the company, Mr. Morris said.

The company's methods and products have already been tested and applauded by local restaurants, he said.

"We just haven't done anything quite at this scale yet, so we'll be phasing the build-out,"

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Mr. Morris said.

A test harvest of 1,800 pounds of shrimp was produced with the cooperation of Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne, and restaurants were gifted some of the product to show them the quality.

"We already have letters of intent with local restaurant who want to purchase from us," Mr. Morris said.


Over the years, American consumers have grown more discerning about their food, and that means food-producers have to measure up to rigorous standards when it comes to preparation and production, he said.

Onsite scientists and managers will ensure the quality and health of the shrimp and other food in production, and it will have to meet state standards as well, Mr. Morris said.

"I'm confident we will sell our product and it's because we will be setting the benchmark for quality. Our ethos is, 'if it isn't good enough for my family, it isn't good enough for yours,'" he said.

For more information about Florida Organic Aquaculture, visit <http://www.flaquaculture.com>.

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