

Florida Organic Aquaculture to have groundbreaking April 29 in Fellsmere | Photo gallery

By Eric Pfahler
Posted April 27, 2013 at 6 a.m.

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SAM WOLFE/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS Workers from Bliss Construction in Plant City build the first of three planned barns at Florida Organic Aquaculture on Wednesday afternoon. Each 180,000-square-foot barn will measure 150 feet wide and 1,200 feet long and contain 2.5 million gallons of water in which to raise shrimp. The first barn is scheduled to be complete by July.

Florida Organic Aquaculture

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FELLSMERE — Fellsmere City Manager [Jason Nunemaker](#) talks about Florida Organic Aquaculture both as an individual economic success and an asset that can be used to help draw other employers to the city.

Florida Organic Aquaculture plans to make a \$13 million capital investment in Fellsmere and hire 60 to 70 employees to harvest and sell fresh sushi-grade colossal shrimp. The company also will house the nonprofit Florida Aquaculture Foundation, which will serve as a research and education component.

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Shrimp farm's groundbreaking set for April 29

Who: Florida Organic Aquaculture

What: The company plans to harvest and sell fresh, sushi-grade colossal shrimp and hire 60 to 70 people.

When: 10 a.m. April 29

Where: 15369 County Road 512 in Fellsmere

Guest speaker: U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla. is slated to be the featured guest speaker for the event, which originally was scheduled for mid-May.

Cost: The company plans to make a \$13 million investment and raised another \$3 million for working capital.

Average wage: The company plans to hire about 60 percent of its workforce from unskilled workers. Entry level positions earn \$13.75 per hour. Other jobs will range to \$90,000 per year for senior scientists.

Project completion: Plans are to have the first pole barn completed by the end of June. The second will be built either late 2013 or early 2014 and the third will be completed once the company is profitable.

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Florida Organic Aquaculture also could be part of a larger economic shift in western Indian River County after helping to bring in a new network of natural gas pipelines built by Florida City Gas. The company is having a groundbreaking Monday, but work already has started.

The shrimp business could serve as a template for the rural community where other area agricultural landowners could be looking to diversify their crops, Nunemaker said.

"We're trying to emphasize and accentuate what we have," Nunemaker said. "We're not trying to compete with let's say Port St. Lucie, that we're going to be the next bio this or that. So we're creating our own little niche, so I think it works really well for us."

The project will be built over 120 acres and initial plans are for three pole barns that each stretch 3 1/2 football fields.

"It's a great opportunity for Fellsmere," Indian River County Chamber of Commerce President Penny Chandler said. "The idea of aquaculture in our county, there have been several places that have been here over the years and this is a great new attempt to grow that line in Indian River County. The business itself is good for the Fellsmere community and will grow jobs in that western section."

The first barn should be completed by the end of June, Florida Organic Aquaculture CEO Clifford Morris said. Morris said savings on construction costs could lead to an additional pole barn.

Nunemaker said he hopes the natural gas infrastructure can help create an agriculturally-based commerce hub, and the city is reaching out to companies that use a lot of energy and could benefit from the cheaper fuel.


"It just opens up a lot of doors over the next five, 10, 15 years," he said.

The natural gas will save the company at least \$600,000 annually once the project is running at full capacity, Morris said.

"What's going to mobilize the American economy for the next 20 or 30 years is the availability of low-cost natural gas," Morris said. "It's a significant economic factor for any businessman making a decision."

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Healing Circle held at Unity of Fort Pierce Friday July 6 at 7pm
Unity of Fort Pierce 7 p.m.

Creative Night at VSA in StuART! 7 p.m.
VISIONARY School of Arts, 1650 S Kanner Hwy. Stuart

Chess at the IRC Main Library 12:30 p.m.
Indian River County Main Library

Cardio Heavy Bag Class 8 p.m.
Sebastian Karate Fitness & Self-Defense Center, 13428 U.S. 1, Sebastian

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Morris said the company has letters of intent with local restaurants to buy the shrimp, and the company has plans to eventually license the technology so others can use it.



PHOTO BY SAM WOLFE

SAM WOLFE/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS
Ponds made out of sandbags will be used at Florida Organic Aquaculture to raise their shrimp. The ponds will be 230 feet long, 30 feet wide and 5 feet high.

“We feel it’s premature for that right now,” Morris said. “The catalyst for that is going to be once we’re in production and come online and view what we’re doing. Then you don’t have to talk as much. Seeing is believing.”

Florida Organic Aquaculture hopes to have its first harvest at the facility in November. The company had a test harvest of 1,800 pounds of shrimp at Florida Institute of Technology in Melbourne. Morris said the produce was donated to restaurants as a goodwill gesture.

The company utilized the federal EB-5 program where foreign investors must invest at least \$500,000 into regional centers that pool money for projects. The Jupiter-based Mirzam Investor Green Card LLC is the regional center that proposed the Fellsmere project. Though the program has come under scrutiny, Nunemaker said the international exposure has been good for Fellsmere. Nunemaker said Florida Organic Aquaculture has been clear about job expectations, both direct and indirect.

“We’ve had, over the past few years, numerous folks from Venezuela, from China, from South America, South Africa, from all over the world coming to Fellsmere who never except for this would have heard of Fellsmere,” Nunemaker said. “So that has just been tremendous for us, so the exposure has been huge. And then specific to aquaculture and those circles, Fellsmere is now on the map.”

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LDouglas writes:

"Morris said the company has letters of intent with local restaurants to buy the shrimp..."

As long as organic is the way the shrimp will be farmed and not just their name, I'm excited about it. Not only to be able to order shrimp more often at local restaurants (I won't eat standard farm raised shrimp due to the pesticides and anti-biotics used to raise them), I am also excited because there's no way wild shrimp will be able to keep up with the demand as our population grows.

They do it right (and it sounds like they are) and they'll have a great business.

(Ha! And we just may see Fellsmere become a mecca for foodies. From the slow food movement to farm to plate. Next up, a winery or two. Cheers!)

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