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Selinsgrove greenhouse to grow healthy produce year round

By MATT FARRAND THE (MILTON) STANDARD-JOURNAL

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Dominick Mack, BrightFarms director of operations, said “ponds” like the one he holds and other items allow more efficient produce growth.

Matt Farrand/The Standard-Journal

SELINGSGROVE — Stakeholders toured the BrightFarms indoor growing facility near Selinsgrove Tuesday.

Dominick Mack, BrightFarms director of operations, said the 300,000 square-foot greenhouse would grow produce year round and faster than by conventional methods. Groundbreaking was in May.

Water-filled ponds were built to grow arugula, spinach, a salad mix called Sunny Crunch and other

produce without dirt.

“The plants absorb the nutrients through the roots in our ponds,” he said. “We procure the seeds and we do everything from start to finish. We germinate the seeds. We plant the seeds onto our ponds, we harvest the plants and pack them.”

Mack said all the produce will be taken daily and cut by a harvest machine then packaged and cooled before shipment.

Speakers included Paul Lightfoot, BrightFarms founder and CEO, Rep. David Rowe (R-85), Department of Agriculture Secretary Russel Redding and Bob Garrett, president and CEO of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce. Personal and economic health, environmental sustainability and the benefits of a “green” businesses were mentioned frequently.

Giant Food Stores, a partner since the project began, was represented by John Ruane, senior vice president of merchandising, and Dave Lessard, vice president of produce.

Steve Platt, BrightFarms CEO, said the first harvest, 2.5 tons of produce, would be donated to the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank.

Joe Arthur, Central Pennsylvania Food Bank executive director, noted the amount of produce in his remarks.

“The 5,000 pounds of leafy greens, and that’s a lot of greens, that has a huge place in our mission,” Arthur said. “The reason that is, is 10 years ago, we committed to providing healthy food to our clients.”

Arthur reminded the gathering they were not far from Wood-Mode in Kreamer. The custom cabinetry company was shut down for a time in 2019, and Arthur said hundreds of additional people were coming to them via a partner church for help.

“Sixty percent of our clients, including children, actually are in working households,” Arthur said. “But things happen, and that’s why we exist.”

Arthur and other speakers noted that BrightFarms would be providing benefits for its 50 employees and would offer a living wage.

A living wage uses a variety of measurements to determine what a person needs to meet basic needs. Among them are food, clothing housing and other essential needs. It can vary from region to region.

