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Headline: New facility to help food makers test products in small batches

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Seow Bei Yi

A new facility for food manufacturers who want to test products in small batches will be available in Woodlands by the end of next year, in a move to encourage innovation across the industry.

Instead of buying equipment that can cost millions of dollars, food companies can rent such tools as spray dryers and microwave-assisted thermal sterilisers on a pay-per-use basis.

The machines can be hired at one of the units for lease in a giant food factory called JTC Food Hub @ Senoko, which was officially launched yesterday.

The small batch production facility – the first of its kind here – aims to support food makers as they innovate to meet people's changing needs and tastes.

"More than ever, consumers today look for ease of preparation and enhanced nutritional value in their food choices," Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry Chee

Hong Tat said at the launch.

Innovative moves can also help the food companies to improve productivity and grow their markets, he said, adding that the industry plays a key role in Singapore's efforts to diversify food sources and strengthen food security.

Mr Chee also noted that the industry added \$4.3 billion to Singapore's gross domestic product last year, a 14 per cent rise from 2016. It employed more than 48,000 workers.

The small batch production facility can be especially useful for small

and medium-sized enterprises, which may not have the scale or in-house capabilities to test new ideas.

"Equipment is expensive and outsourcing to a contract manufacturer requires a larger minimum order size than what they need," Mr Chee noted. Such a minimum order can typically be in thousands of units.

Even larger companies, which can do such manufacturing in-house, may be discouraged by the possible necessity to shut down production lines to do so, said Mr

Leong Hong Yew, director of government agency JTC Corp's food and lifestyle cluster.

The new 1,130 sq m facility will be operated by the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT).

Yesterday, SIT, JTC and Enterprise Singapore signed a memorandum of understanding for its establishment.

The prices it will charge have yet to be finalised.

The \$214 million JTC Food Hub @ Senoko spans 3.3 ha, and includes an integrated facility comprising a

cold room and warehouse that can be rented.

JTC's Mr Leong said the integrated facility, operated by logistics provider StorBest, can improve efficiency, on top of a pallet conveyor system that can transfer products automatically between floors.

The conveyor system helped sway wholesale bakery Food Fresh to move into JTC Food Hub.

Food Fresh's business development director Jeffrey Ngiam said: "We operate factories in two different locations, with the storage space in a separate building. We decided to combine our operations here, where storage can also be in the same place."

byseow@sph.com.sg

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