

## **FOOD PROCESSING HUB ADDS VALUE TO ALBERNI VALLEY AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY**

COURTENAY - More than two dozen new jobs are anticipated in the Alberni Valley in the next few years, thanks to a new food handling and processing facility being developed by the Port Alberni Port Authority.

The Island Coastal Economic Trust is investing \$300,000 in the \$1.5M project.

The Alberni Valley Regional Food Hub involves the revitalization of a dormant fish processing plant into a CFIA and Province of BC certified shared use food and beverage processing facility. The hub will provide business owners with affordable access to production facilities, specialized equipment, new technology, expertise and services.

“Historically, our region has been an exporter of unprocessed products, largely because of lack of certified handling and processing facilities,” said Port Alberni Port Authority President and CEO, Zoran Knezevic. “This new facility will enable marine harvesters and land-based farmers to keep value-added food processing jobs in our region, improve export opportunities and meet demand for locally produced and processed food.”

The new Food Hub will include separate sections for shellfish, fin fish, seaweed and terrestrial food processing. Commercial kitchen space, small-scale food processing equipment, food testing, refrigeration, shipping and handling amenities are key components of the facility plan.

“There’s a big difference between operating a solo food production operation, and scaling-up to a sustainable business, and costs involved in making that transition can be a big barrier to entry,” said Pat Deakin, City of Port Alberni Economic Development Officer. “This facility will support new startups and scale-up for small producers who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford the significant infrastructure and equipment costs on their own.”

The marine food processing sections, each with its own unique CFIA certification, will be occupied by four anchor tenants. The terrestrial food processing section will be operated with a membership-based model, providing multiple small scale producers with access to all shared-use equipment and facilities, with fees subject to use.

By reducing barriers through a shared-infrastructure production facility, the opportunities for developing new products and innovative processing methods are increased dramatically. This means that existing small producers can test and validate their ideas in ways that weren’t previously possible without significant financial investment.



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“Shared waterfront use and industry diversification is critical to the long term economic growth and prosperity of our town and region,” said Port Alberni Port Authority Chair Ron Crema. “This project is especially exciting due to its incubator style business model.”

The project is among the first four food hubs in BC to receive funding and designation from the Province of BC as a Regional Food Hub. The future vision is to connect other regional food hubs across the Province into a BC Food Hub Network.

“Food Innovation Hubs, such as this one, have proven to be cost-effective solutions to the challenges faced by small scale food processors,” said ICET Chair Josie Osborne. “Improved productivity and business growth through innovation is one of the key pillars of our Innovation Infrastructure funding stream, and fully aligns with our strategic priority to support the agri-food sector.”

ICET’s economic analysis forecasts more than \$5 million in new annual economic activity and the creation of 27 permanent local jobs in the first 3-5 years. As the companies involved grow and scale, employment and regional impact is expected to increase.

The project works are expected to begin shortly, with completion anticipated by June 2020.

### **About the Island Coastal Economic Trust**

Created and capitalized by the Province of BC, the Island Coastal Economic Trust (ICET) has been at the forefront of economic diversification, planning and regional revitalization for the past thirteen years.

ICET is independently governed by a Board of Directors and two Regional Advisory Committees which include more than 50 locally elected officials, MLAs and appointees from the Island and Coast. This exceptional team of leaders collaborate to set regional priorities and build vital multi-regional networks.

Through a community centered decision-making process, ICET has approved more than \$52 million in funding for over 200 economic infrastructure and economic development readiness projects. These investments have leveraged over \$270 million in new investment into the region creating more than 2500 construction phase jobs and 2650 long term permanent jobs.

A full overview of ICET can be found at [www.islandcoastaltrust.ca](http://www.islandcoastaltrust.ca)



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**For further information:**

Line Robert, CEO  
Island Coastal Economic Trust  
Tel. 250-871-7797 (Ext. 227)  
[line.robert@islandcoastaltrust.ca](mailto:line.robert@islandcoastaltrust.ca)

Mayor Josie Osborne, ICET Chair  
District of Tofino  
Tel. 250-725-3229  
[osborne@tofino.ca](mailto:osborne@tofino.ca)

Zoran Knezevic, President & CEO  
Port Alberni Port Authority  
Tel: 250-723-5312 (Ext. 225)  
[zknezevic@alberniport.ca](mailto:zknezevic@alberniport.ca)