

Oct. 09, 2013

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PORT ALLEN — A \$150 million expansion and modernization of the grain facility at the Port of Greater Baton Rouge, which will provide 37 additional jobs and more opportunities for Louisiana farmers, was dedicated Tuesday.

Already, Louis Dreyfus officials said the company is looking at further expansions of the Port Allen facility, including rail capacity at the facility and more storage space. The company said the improvements will take place over the next two or three years. “They just keep adding on,” said Jay Hardman, port director. “Right about the time we think they are over and done with, they add another phase. “They were pouring concrete last night. That shows the confidence they have in the port, the state as a whole and the U.S. as a whole.”

Louis Dreyfus Commodities, a global merchandiser of oilseeds, grains, feed and rice, cut the ribbon on the flagship export facility on the Mississippi River. The first ship is set to arrive later this week. Ciro Echesortu, the CEO of Louis Dreyfus Commodities, noted the ship had a promising name: the Equinox Dream.

The 37 new jobs will have an average annual salary of \$65,000, plus benefits, said Gov. Bobby Jindal. Louis Dreyfus already had 23 employees at the port. The expansion is projected to create another 32 indirect jobs, Louisiana’s economic development department estimates. And the project generated 100 construction jobs. “This is just the beginning of a great long-term relationship for our state,” Jindal said.

Margarita Louis-Dreyfus, chairwoman of the Louis Dreyfus Group, said while the U.S. government may be shut down, “Our grain elevator is defiantly open.”

Echesortu said the dedication was the culmination of two years worth of work.

“This facility is essential to our global operations utilizing capacity to handle continuing growth of demand for exports outside the U.S.,” he said. That growth in demand will help local farmers. Echesortu said half of the soybeans and cargo that will be loaded onto ships will come from farmers within a 60-mile radius. Louisiana Agriculture Commissioner Mike Strain said 60 percent of the agricultural wealth of the United States comes down the Mississippi River by barge. “And what’s the first port? Right here,” he said.

The new elevator will handle up to 5 million metric tons of grains and oilseeds annually during the first phase of operations. The dock will be able to load a vessel at a rate of 100,000 bushels an hour and unload at the rate of 80,000 bushels an hour.

Louis Dreyfus is leasing the port grain facilities for 20 years, with the option for an additional 10-year lease period. The Paris company obtained the lease in a competitive process after making a commitment to upgrade the grain elevator and dock. The company is expected to use the state’s Quality Jobs incentive in conjunction with the project.