

## Sunbelt announces processing plant

By Greg Vandermeulen  
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Rumours of the possible arrival of a processing plant in the Sunbelt region were confirmed last week, as Sunbelt Development Group announced the planned construction of Sunbelt Prairie Products Ltd. A food processing company, it will open a 25,000 square foot facility in the RM of Rhineland Agricultural Park, located north of Altona.

Jim Spencer of Sunbelt Development Group said the company will ship their product to the Eastern Seaboard and Europe.

From factory to store shelves

"They'll be processing edible beans, peas and lentils into shelf sized packages," he said.

Since Sunbelt's creation, this is one of the first major developments brought in.

And Spencer said it is an important one for the region and the organization.

"It's a large deal for Sunbelt because it's a large deal for the area," Spencer said.

The first phase of the project will require about 25 employees, and construction will start soon.

"They're planning to be in the ground by April," he said adding they will be ready to process the 2008 crop.

Planning process

Months of work have already gone into the planning.

"We began discussions last September/October with these folks," Spencer said. "It's been pretty intense since then."

He added that the work doesn't stop as soon as the location was confirmed.

"One of our commitments is to assist them until they've become established," he said.

CEO of Sunbelt Prairie Products, Makhdoom Abbas will be in Altona on March 7 to discuss the plans in greater detail.

A family run company

Sunbelt Prairie Products is owned by Zeb Rice Ltd. a family owned company which was started in 1966 and based in Pakistan.

Zeb Rice also owns a company called Amanat Nawaz Rice AB, built in Sweden in 2004. That plant alone processes close to 26,000 tons of rice per year for 10 European countries.

The rice is distributed from Pakistan, India, Thailand and the United States.

The company also has processing facilities in Canada, specializing in the processing and packaging of pulse and lentil crops which are marketed throughout Europe and North America.