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NEWS STORY

Regina lands pulse plant via pact with Turkish firm

Bruce Johnston
Saskatoon StarPhoenix

REGINA -- Regina will become the site of a \$5.2-million pulse processing plant next year, thanks to a deal between a Turkish company, the government's immigrant investment fund and a labour-sponsored venture capital corporation.

Saskcan Pulse Trading Inc., a joint venture involving Arbel Pulse and Grain Co. of Turkey, Saskatchewan Government Growth Fund and Regina-based Crown Ventures Fund Inc., will build and operate the plant.

Murad Al-Katib, president of Saskcan, said the company was formed in July for the purpose of building a 75,000-tonne-a-year lentil processing plant in Saskatchewan.

"We did decide on Regina (as the plant location) about two months ago," said Al-Katib, a Saskatchewan native of Turkish descent, who worked 5 1/2 years as a trade development officer with Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP).

While the plant will be in Regina, Al-Katib said the benefits will accrue to all Saskatchewan farmers, who are world leaders in pulse production. The facility will extend the entire province's reach in this market because of value-added pulse processing, he said.

The majority owners of Saskcan are the Arslan family, which controls Arbel, a 51-year-old company that's the oldest and largest pulse processor in Turkey. Arbel is also the largest importer of Canadian red lentils in the world, with annual imports of 32,000 tonnes of lentils. And Saskatchewan is the largest producer of lentils in the world, with 97 per cent of Canadian production.

"This crop is grown destined for emerging markets in the world," said Al-Katib. "It's a staple of the diet in many of the countries we're exporting to (in) North Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia."

Crown Ventures Fund and SGGF are putting up \$1.2 million in debt and equity, pending board approval from Crown Ventures Fund. The Arslan family is investing \$1.15 million in the venture, plus providing technical

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About \$2.85 million in term financing is being provided by Farm Credit Canada and Business Development Bank of Canada, while operating financing is being provided by CIBC.

The total project cost, including operating financing, is about \$9.75 million. Al-Katib said the Saskcan plant is set to begin construction east of Regina with completion scheduled for next July.



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