

**School lunch favorite--made in Perham**

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A school lunch classic with a makeover will be served at schools throughout the Midwest--and the product will be another "made with pride in Perham" export.

Peanut butter-less and jelly sandwiches by the millions will be produced at the former Nelson Confections/Route 66 chocolate plant.

Georgia peanut farmers will lose, but Great Plains sunflower growers will gain as a new company, SunWise Foods, will create sunflower butter and jelly sandwiches.

The product is a crustless bread, wrapped around sunbutter and jelly similar to a pocket bread, which will be frozen and sold for school lunch programs, according to Perham Economic Development Agency director Chuck Johnson, who reported on the new business at the June 8 Perham City Council meeting.

To pave way for the project, the council approved JOEZ incentives for the plant and also transferred JOEZ-eligible acreage to the Nelson building. The facility is owned by Kenny Nelson, Barrel O' Fun and KLN Enterprises, and Nelson will be a minority owner of SunWise Foods.

Schools throughout the United States are looking for an alternative to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, in light of increasing peanut allergy concerns. Market research shows a growing demand for a convenient, affordable product such as this that will be peanut free, will meet nutritional requirements and will taste good, according to Johnson.

Based on preliminary market research, the company estimates the current market for the product to be 15 million sandwiches per year. First-year projections call for one million sandwiches.

Because the ingredients will be obtained from regional suppliers and vendors, the finished product will be sold to a potentially national market. The economic impact will have an impact on the region and state, noted Johnson.

The sandwiches will be produced in the 11,250 square foot building. The firm is expected to employ eight.