

Ripon cookie plant closing may boost S. Beloit business

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The closing of a cookie-making facility in Ripon may mean new jobs at the ConAgra Foods cookie plant in South Beloit.

ConAgra Foods announced earlier this week it will be closing its cookie plant on the west side of Ripon this year. The closure will affect more than 300 workers and layoffs will occur between September and the end of this year.

Dan Hare, spokesperson for ConAgra Foods, said the plan is to move some production from Ripon to the ConAgra Foods South Beloit facility, formerly Bremner Foods.

“Some of the cookies currently made in the soft bake and enrobed (chocolate covered) cookies facility in Ripon will transition to South Beloit, Ill.,” Hare said in an emailed statement. “We have not finalized the details, but we will keep our employees informed as we work through the process.”

ConAgra Foods in South Beloit currently employs 210 people. Hare said the company will make staffing decisions based on the needs of the business and what is transitioned to the South Beloit facility.

Ripon still has a ConAgra Foods facility on the east side of the city which employs about 80 people and produces wafer cookies. The workers who will lose their jobs in Ripon can apply for jobs at other ConAgra Foods facilities. Hare said company officials are meeting with employees to discuss the transition.

In 2012 ConAgra acquired Ralcorp Holdings, which operated 17 plants including the Bremner Corp. cookie plant in South Beloit. Bremner had operated in South Beloit since 2005 after purchasing the buildings that formerly housed the Bake-Line Group and Pate Foods. Bake-Line had declared bankruptcy and closed abruptly in 2004.

ConAgra is a multi-faceted company which produces many well-known food brands such as Chef Boyardee, Wesson Oil, Slim Jim beef jerky, Jiffy Pop popcorn and more.