

## **Coming to America: Niche Cocoa Services Chooses Franklin**

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The West African cocoa firm Niche Cocoa Industry Ltd. chose a 44,000-square-foot production facility in the Franklin Business Park as the site for its first American cocoa processing plant. And they are convinced they made the right call.

"We're thrilled to be in Franklin," said Steve Wallace, founder and president of Omanhene Cocoa Bean Co., Niche's local partner. "Everything that we thought was attractive at first glance continues to be attractive."

The decision to open a U.S. location represented the largest food and beverage investment by an African-based company in U.S. history and the largest Ghanaian foreign direct investment ever in Wisconsin.

Niche Cocoa is a privately held, global cocoa processing company with headquarters in Tema, Ghana. The company is the largest cocoa processor in Ghana, the world's second-largest cocoa producer after the Ivory Coast.

In 2020, the sole shareholder of Niche Cocoa, Edmund Poku, who resides in Ghana but attended graduate school at Columbia University in New York City, began a quest to find a facility that would be closer to his U.S. customers to allow more extensive business development in the country.

Poku contacted Wallace, founder and president of Omanhene Cocoa Bean Co., which has operations in Milwaukee and Accra, Ghana and pioneered production of world-class, single-origin, bean-to-bar chocolate manufactured in Ghana.

"He was originally thinking of New Jersey because he went to graduate school there and he was familiar with that area," Wallace said. "I told him that Southeastern Wisconsin has this amazing food and beverage cluster and that he'd do well to look here. He was a little reluctant at first but I encouraged him to come out and take a look."

Poku, Wallace and a Niche Cocoa board member toured sites in several communities in Southeastern Wisconsin, as well as the Franklin Business Park.

"We were all blown away by the Franklin Business Park, especially its easy access to the freeway and the fact that the building was brand new and had been built on spec. Everything looked great for a food production facility."

Niche Cocoa has found success mainly from extracting high-quality semi-finished products from the cocoa bean. The United States became a natural choice for expansion, given its market size and potential. Niche Cocoa chose Wisconsin and Franklin specifically because of access to customers, logistics, a trained workforce and business friendly environment.

The Wisconsin Economic Development Corp., Milwaukee 7's business attraction arm and the city of Franklin worked to land Niche Cocoa, which has joined several other well-known food processors and manufacturers in the Franklin Business Park.

When completed, the Niche Cocoa facility will operate one line for chocolate manufacturing and another that will produce powder.

"I think this is a great location. It hits all the right notes," Wallace said. "The Franklin Business Park even has big left-turn lanes for semis to come in. It's all been thought out really well for manufacturing. No one cut corners. Everything works there and it's beautiful. Even the streetlights are gorgeous. It's a first-class business park."