

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 12, 2021

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AVANT ORGANICS TO LAUNCH MANUFACTURING SITE AT CENTRAL LOUISIANA PORT

Parent firm Crest Industries will create 40 new direct jobs through \$4 million capital investment

ALEXANDRIA, La. — Today, Gov. John Bel Edwards highlighted the creation of Avant Organics LLC, a new specialty chemicals company that plans to manufacture innovative products at the Central Louisiana Regional Port in Alexandria, subject to a final lease agreement. Parent company Crest Industries will make a \$4 million capital investment and create 40 new direct jobs through the project.

Avant Organics represents a new business sector for Crest Industries. Based in Pineville, Louisiana, Crest Industries employs more than 800 people in a diverse slate of companies serving customers in electrical infrastructure, distribution, industrial services and natural resources. Avant Organics will apply advanced scientific research to enhance attributes, such as flavor and fragrance, for products in the food and beverage, pharmaceutical and other sectors. The company's new direct jobs will feature an average annual salary of \$75,000, plus benefits, and Louisiana Economic Development estimates the project will yield another 215 new indirect jobs, for a total of 255 new jobs in Central Louisiana.

"Since its founding more than 60 years, Crest Industries has grown through a commitment to customer service, continuous improvement and creativity," Gov. John Bel Edwards said. "That dedication has produced one of Central Louisiana's leading business success stories. The latest venture by Crest Industries demonstrates the value of innovation for our economy, and the value of leveraging Louisiana's transportation strengths. We're encouraged by the decision to locate Avant Organics at one of our key ports on the Red River."

Avant Organics would be the second Crest Industries company with a permanent facility at the Central Louisiana Regional Port. DIS-TRAN Packaged Substations operates at the port and has produced thousands of customized electrical substations for the nation's power grid. Though Avant Organics will operate in a different industry sector, the Red River location complements the import-export and workforce needs of each business.

"We empower our people to be innovators and find solutions that have a lasting impact on the industries and people we serve," said Kenny Robison, Crest Industries CEO and owner. "At Crest, we believe and teach the concept of having a founder's mentality. By empowering the frontlines of our company with the tools and resources they need, they will help lead Crest into the future. And that is exactly how Avant Organics was created."

Brad Fontenot, the president of DIS-TRAN Packaged Substations, also will serve as the chief executive within the Avant Organics organization. LED began formal project discussions with Crest Industries, Avant Organics and the Central Louisiana Regional Port about the new project at the beginning of 2021.

To secure the Avant Organics project, the State of Louisiana offered a competitive incentive package that includes the comprehensive workforce solutions of LED FastStart® – the nation’s No. 1 state workforce training program. In addition, Avant Organics will be eligible for a \$500,000 performance-based Economic Development Award Program grant for site infrastructure costs, and the company is expected to utilize Louisiana’s Quality Jobs and Industrial Tax Exemption programs.

“Crest Industries is an important component of the Central Louisiana economy,” said President and CEO Jim Clinton of the Central Louisiana Economic Development Alliance. “We applaud their leadership and commitment to the region with the addition of new jobs and capital investment here in Rapides Parish. Investments like this one continue to diversify our economy and showcase the ability and capacity of our people. CLEDA is proud to work alongside our valued partners to grow the number of great Central Louisiana manufacturers throughout the region who underscore our brand, *Central Louisiana: We Make Good Stuff.*”

The Central Louisiana Regional Port and its tenants benefit from a Foreign Trade Zone associated with nearby England Airpark. Through the FTZ designation, Avant Organics will be able to import raw materials at the Alexandria port and convert them into manufactured products without paying customs duties. In addition to nearby Alexandria International Airport and interstate highway access, the port’s tenants benefit from Class I rail service provided by Union Pacific and Kansas City Southern railroads.

“The Central Louisiana Regional Port is proud to call Crest Industries a partner,” said Ben Russo, the port’s executive director. “Crest, time and time again, proves its ability to adapt to ever-changing markets through innovation and by leveraging great talent across Louisiana. They’ve used their current location at CLRP to revolutionize the electrical substation market and I am certain they will do it again in this next venture.”

Crest Industries officials expect to begin production at the Avant Organics port facility by the third quarter of 2021. Job seekers interested in future work at Avant Organics may submit résumés and search for positions as they become available at CrestOperations.com/careers.

About Crest Industries

Founded in 1958, Crest Industries is the operating company for a family of world-class, project-oriented businesses specialized in electric power delivery, industrial services, distribution and natural resources. The vertically integrated family of companies can see industrial projects through from start to finish and prides itself on the values of doing the right thing, winning together, questioning the status quo, and rising to the challenge. Crest Industries is a growing company focused on continuous improvement and dedicated to leveraging a strong foundation and finding the right people to help deliver on customers’ needs. For details, visit CrestOperations.com.

About LED

Louisiana Economic Development is responsible for strengthening the state’s business environment and creating a more vibrant Louisiana economy. LED cultivates jobs and economic opportunity for the people of Louisiana, and promotes business opportunity for employers of all sizes. In 2020, LED attracted 58 new economic development projects representing over 11,600 new jobs, 8,600 retained jobs and more than \$12.7 billion in new capital investment. LED’s Small Business Services team, in conjunction with the Louisiana Small Business Development Center Network, assisted more than 17,500 Louisiana small businesses and entrepreneurs in 2020. For more information, visit OpportunityLouisiana.com.

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