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Food institute gets \$1 million

Money expected to bring 1,000 professionals

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New federal support is expected to help bring 1,000 food safety professionals to Battle Creek next year.

U.S. Rep. Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, announced Monday that the International Food Protection Training Institute will receive \$1 million to help train food safety officials from around the country.

Speaking at Western Michigan University's Kendall Center, Schauer said the funding he initially requested shows there's federal backing to handle the food safety concerns of Americans and the federal government.

"We are in discussions with the White House to get some longer-term funding," Schauer said. "We know we've got \$1 million to get us started."

The money is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2010 spending bill approved by both the U.S. House and Senate. President Barack Obama could sign the bill this week.

Since opening in July, the institute has trained more than 200 food safety professionals from 28 different states. The institute was helped by a \$2 million start-up grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

Steve Benoit, a founding board member of the institute, said the federal money will pay to bring more people to Battle Creek for food safety training seminars. One of the biggest barriers for creating such an institute in the past, he said, was that local and state governments did not have funding to send people to training across the country.

Benoit said the institute's goal is to train 1,000 people in Battle Creek next year, and with ongoing support that number could reach 4,000 annually.

Benoit said the support of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation was critical in winning federal help.

"It didn't look like a handout that someone was requesting," he said. "It actually looked like the partnership that it is."

Schauer said support for the institute had been his top funding priority because of its potential to bring skilled jobs to Battle Creek.

The International Food Protection Training Institute is billed as a major piece of the plan to revive downtown Battle Creek by making the area a center for food safety.