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Juice bottler moving to Norwich Business Park from Preston

By [Claire Bessette](#) Day Staff Writer

Norwich - Maple Lane Farms will move its black currant bottling operation from Preston to the Stanley Israelite Norwich Business Park, a move that will allow double production capacity and space for future expansion, owner Allyn Brown said.

Maple Lane's black currant company, called Connecticut Currant, sells several juice products under the label "Currant Affair," including juice blends with apple and cranberry juice and a straight apple cider.

The company also does contract bottling of juice and cider for several companies, including non-dairy drinks made by The Farmer's Cow, such as lemonade and ice tea.

"That part of the business is really growing too," Brown said. "Between Connecticut Currant and contract packaging, we needed to find a larger space."

Brown said his company has signed a purchase contract with owner SN Real Estate LLC for the long-vacant former Sybron Chemical Inc. building at 29 Stott Ave. in the business park. Brown expects to close on the building by late August and create a new juice bottling company, Norwich Beverage Co., by the end of the year.

Brown declined to disclose the purchase price, but said he expects to invest \$300,000 in the 26,000-square-foot site to install a large cooler and bottling production lines.

Connecticut Currant processes 600,000 units of drink products per year in the 3,000-square-foot Preston building at Maple Lane Farms. The farm is the largest grower of black currants in North America, Brown said.

The facility is bursting at the seams, with bottles stored in trailers parked next to the plant. The one bottling line fills 60 bottles per minute with five employees. The new plant will have two bottling lines at the start, with room to expand to up to four lines, Brown said, and will have about a dozen employees.

When the new plant opens, Connecticut Currant will be a customer of Norwich Beverage Co., along with the other juice companies, Brown said.

"It's an exciting move for us," Brown said. "It's taking a nice building that has been shut down for 15 years and revitalizing it. We look forward to having (Norwich Public Utilities) for our power, and having a lot more square footage."

Norwich Mayor Deberay Hinchey welcomed the move, and said Brown has visited her office to talk about the plans.

"They worked hard," she said. "I think it is a real credit to Allyn Brown's creativity and business sense that he was able to work things out and make something happen there. I think he has the potential for growth. It means jobs here in Norwich."

Norwich Community Development Corp. Executive Director Robert Mills credited Brown and his attorney, William Sweeney, for working out a complex arrangement to complete a long-standing environmental cleanup at the building. Outstanding environmental issues have made the vacant building difficult to market, Mills said.

Sweeney said the major environmental cleanup, including removal of contaminated soil, at the former chemical plant was done years ago and did not present a problem to Brown's plans. The building is in good shape, with mostly open floor space.

But Sweeney said Brown had to work out an agreement with previous owner Lanxess Corp., which was responsible for the cleanup, to complete the last remediation work after Brown closes on the purchase. Sweeney thanked the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for assisting with that part of the deal.

"We're very excited," said Sweeney, the former Norwich city planner. "We're moving a small fast-moving business into Norwich and bringing a building that has been vacant for years back to production."

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