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## **Tortilla Maker Mission Foods Expanding to Lakeland**

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*THE LEDGER*

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**LAKELAND | So who is the national food manufacturer with plans for a big Lakeland expansion in 2012?**

Irving, Texas-based Mission Foods, according to a local source with knowledge of the deal.

Mission Foods, which touts itself as one of the world's largest producers of tortilla products, plans to expand to Lakeland next year and will hire more than 130 people during a period of roughly three years.

Details about the expansion were announced last week during a Lakeland City Commission agenda study, but Mission's name was kept under wraps. Mission officials could not be reached for comment on Tuesday.

Mission is expected to operate from a 168,000-square-foot warehouse off Interstate 4 in Northwest Lakeland. The company plans to invest \$23 million in the facility, which will be located near Pepperidge Farm in the Interstate Business Park.

Steve Scruggs, director of the Lakeland Economic Development Council, said on

Friday that Mission will fill 133 positions over a period of about three years. Salaries for employees will average about \$30,000.

Scruggs said he expects the business to open in the summer of 2012. Currently, bids are being taken for construction in the facility. Mission is expected to receive a total of \$130,000 in incentives from Lakeland and Polk County government for its expansion.

Mission Foods is a division of the Monterrey, Mexico-based Gruma S.A. firm, which was formed in 1949. Mission has 15 plants in the United States and sells tortillas under the Mission and Guerrero brand names.

In addition to tortillas, Mission's products include wraps, taco shells, tostadas, tortilla chips, salsa and dips.

The publicly-traded Gruma announced its third quarter earnings on Oct. 26 and reported a profit of more than \$11 million for the quarter, down 34 percent from the year before. In the year-ago period, Gruma had a gain from its stake in Mexican bank Grupo Financiero Banorte , which it sold earlier this year, according to Reuters.

Third-quarter revenues for the company were up 30 percent from last year to approximately \$1.1 billion. The company is looking to expand in Europe, the Middle East and the United States, Chief Executive Raul Pelaez told Reuters in an interview in July.

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