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# New USDA food safety lab breaks ground in Normandy

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NORMANDY — A new “state-of-the-art” laboratory on the site of what was a nearly 150-year-old convent will house dozens of U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists now based at an aging federal complex on Goodfellow Boulevard.

Officials with the USDA and the federal General Services Administration held a ceremonial groundbreaking Wednesday to kick off construction on the future Midwest Laboratory for the USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service. The site, at 7626 Natural Bridge Road, is the former Immaculate Heart Convent, which had been owned by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd since 1874.

The convent began winding down in 2018 due to the age of the building and the nuns who lived there. Last year, the Roman Catholic order sold the property to Kansas City-based U.S. Federal Properties Co., a firm that specializes in developing and leasing properties to the federal government.

The federal GSA, which manages federal properties and provides other business services for the government, signed a 20-year

lease worth \$115 million for the new laboratory on behalf of the USDA Food Safety service.

“At GSA, we want all federal spaces to empower employees to do their best work, bolster the missions of agencies like USDA, and support the local community,” GSA Administrator Robin Carnahan, a former Missouri Secretary of State appointed by President Joe Biden to run the GSA in 2021, said in a statement. “This partnership with USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service and the community of Normandy is going to help ensure that federal employees have a safe, state-of-the-art, and sustainable facility where they can continue to provide great service to the American people.”

Carnahan was scheduled to appear at the groundbreaking along with USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service Administrator Paul Kiecker and Normandy Mayor Mark Beckmann.

The Food Safety Inspection Service’s roughly 60 employees at its St. Louis-based Midwest Laboratory are expected to move to the new facility in mid-2025.

The Midwest Laboratory is currently housed in the nearby Goodfellow Federal Center in north St.

Louis. GSA officials are in the process of winding down operations at the 23-building campus built in 1941 after a damning 2019 federal audit substantiated concerns about lead and asbestos health hazards at the complex and prompted complaints from union leaders.

GSA in 2020 signed a 20-year lease to move 1,000 workers — about half of the workforce at the Goodfellow complex — to the Metropolitan Square building downtown. About 1,500 of the Goodfellow workers were USDA employees, though employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs and Social Security Administration also worked from the site.

The St. Louis Food Safety and Inspection Service lab is one of just three in the country, and the new lab will sit next to the University of Missouri-St. Louis campus and a MetroLink station.

“This is the first FSIS laboratory construction in recent years where we have been able to participate in the top-to-bottom design process to specifically meet our needs,” Kiecker, the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service administrator, said in a statement. “This new facility will advance FSIS’ operational excellence, increase

our overall efficiency because of our close proximity to a major airport, and enable us to recruit the next generation of talented employees from St. Louis colleges and universities.”

Federal Properties Co. tapped Des Peres-based McCarthy Building Companies for the construction project. McCarthy has experience building federal facilities including the under-construction western headquarters of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in north St. Louis.

The building is currently in design and expected to begin construction next year.

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