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Dole may build in Gaston

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Barry Smith

Freedom Raleigh Bureau

RALEIGH - A state senator said that he believes a "positive announcement" will be forthcoming from Dole Foods Co., which is considering building up to two processing plants in Gaston County and could eventually employ up to 3,000 people.

"I'm very confident that we'll see a positive announcement," Sen. David Hoyle, a Gaston County Democrat, said on Thursday. "It's still on the front burner.

He said that he believes that officials from Dole are waiting on Gov. Mike Easley to sign the bill that extends the Bill Lee Act, the state statute that provides tax credits for job creation in North Carolina.

That act includes provisions that would apply to Dole, should it decide to locate in North Carolina.

The bill cleared the General Assembly on July 20 and was presented to Easley on the same day.

Under the N.C. Constitution, Easley has 10 days - or until Saturday - to decide whether to sign the law or veto it. If he does neither, it becomes law automatically.

"He's carefully reviewing the bill," Sherri Johnson, Easley's press secretary, said on Thursday.

Dole owner David Murdock is considering locating the processing plants in Gaston and a research facility at the former Cannon Mills/Pillowtex plant in Kannapolis. Murdock, who formerly owned Cannon, purchased the now-empty Pillowtex property last year.

Murdock came to Raleigh last week to visit with state leaders, including Easley and House Speaker Jim Black, D-Mecklenburg. He also planned a visit to the Outer Banks to eat at the restaurant owned by Senate President Pro-tem Marc Basnight, D-Dare.

Barry Smith can be reached at bsmith@link.freedom.com.

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