**Blue Bell expanding 'little creamery'**

By Carol Christian | January 4, 2013 | Updated: January 5, 2013 2:46pm

Whatever it might say for the economy, Blue Bell Ice Cream is hot.

Now available in 20 states, the product is selling so well that Blue Bell Creameries has begun a project that will expand its Brenham plant by 25 percent, the company said.

It's the first major expansion since the early 1990s at the Brenham facility, about 70 miles northwest of Houston, said [Paul Prazak](http://www.chron.com/?controllerName=search&action=search&channel=business&search=1&inlineLink=1&query=%22Paul+Prazak%22), manager of plant operations.

"Ice cream has held really well during the last several years, and our business has greatly increased," Prazak said.

One reason may be that, with higher gas prices, people have stayed home with comfort food, Prazak said.

"We don't know for sure if that's what it is, or if it's that we strive to have a great quality product day in and day out," he said.

The $14 million expansion of cold storage and production capacity will add about 100,000 square feet to the existing plant. "We're trying to fill the growth needs," Prazak said.

As in the existing plant, the cold storage area will feature an automated storage and retrieval system for pallets of ice cream products waiting to be shipped. "Once the product is on a pallet, we don't touch it," Prazak said.

For its construction project, Blue Bell received a tax "phase-in" that will save the company about $442,000 over eight years, said [Julie Fulgham](http://www.chron.com/?controllerName=search&action=search&channel=business&search=1&inlineLink=1&query=%22Julie+Fulgham%22), the city of Brenham's director of development service.

Blue Bell was one of three Brenham manufacturers granted tax phase-in agreements in 2012, she said.

Along with the larger footprint, the privately held company that calls itself "the little creamery in Brenham" will add 50 employees over the phase-in period, Fulgham said. The plant currently has 875 employees.

At this time, the company isn't planning to move into other states but is considering an additional city in one of the 20 mostly Southern states where Blue Bell is already sold, said Ricky Dickson, vice president of sales and marketing.

"We don't want to outpace ourselves," Dickson said.

Despite its limited geographic range, Blue Bell is the nation's third best-selling ice cream, behind Breyers and Dreyer's, he said.

The company's top seller is Homemade Vanilla.

Initially called [Brenham Creamery Company](http://www.chron.com/?controllerName=search&action=search&channel=business&search=1&inlineLink=1&query=%22Brenham+Creamery+Company%22), the business opened in 1907 as a dairy farmers' cooperative, according to the company's website. It changed its name in 1930 to Blue Bell Creameries, after the Texas wildflower.

Expansion beyond Brenham started in the early 1960s, with sales in Houston, Prazak said.

In 1992, it built a second production plant in Broken Arrow, Okla., and in 1996 added a third in Sylacauga, Ala.

The company also has 57 distribution facilities scattered throughout the states where the product is sold.

http://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Blue-Bell-nearly-doubling-size-of-little-4167594.php