

Salinas Valley innovation hub designation sought

By LANE WALLACE

Herald Staff Writer

Posted: 07/24/2010 01:33:23 AM PDT

Updated: 07/24/2010 01:33:23 AM PDT

An application to make the Salinas Valley an innovation hub has been submitted to the governor's Office of Economic Development.

The idea is to create "a network that represents a common goal" of bringing innovation and jobs to the area, said Abby Taylor-Silva, vice president of policy and communications for the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, lead agency for the application.

Encouraging agricultural research has long been a theme of Salinas Mayor Dennis Donohue.

Monterey County is one of eight applicants for the second round of designations, Taylor-Silva said. She doesn't know how many will be selected.

Six areas were designated what the state calls iHubs earlier this year: Sacramento, Rohnert Park, Livermore Valley, San Francisco, Palm Springs, Orange County and San Diego.

There is no money involved in the designation, but it could gain recognition for the area and might help if grants become available later, Taylor-Silva said.

Among the backers of the application are the University of California, CSU Monterey Bay, Hartnell College, the city of Salinas, the county, the Salinas Valley Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Center, CHISPA affordable housing agency, and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association.

It hasn't been decided what type of innovation companies to seek for the iHub, but food safety and water conservation are key issues now, Taylor-Silva said.

"The Salinas Valley has a history of innovation," she said, including machines for packing broccoli in the field, lettuce loading machines, and advances in drip irrigation.