Salt Mine Expansion
Set In Breaux Bridge

By DEB DAVID
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ST. MARTINVILLE — Cargill Company is planning an $8 million expansion at its Breaux Bridge plant that will employ about 16 additional workers, representatives from Minneapolis said Tuesday.

A delegation from the company met with St. Martin Parish police jurors to outline plans and obtain preliminary approval for the project.

The jury sanctioned Cargill's expansion project and authorized—pending state bonding commission approval—the issuance of $10 million in industrial revenue bonds to finance construction.

Investment bankers of Montgomery, Ala., who say they are ready to buy Cargill's bonds when they are issued also attended Tuesday's meeting.

Although the estimated project cost is $8 million, Leisz says the company is seeking $10 in bonds as a cushion against unforeseen increases. Payback of the borrowed money is not to exceed 30 years.

The bonds are tax-exempt and are to be issued by a jury-appointed board after some preliminary legal documents are filed with the bonding commission and federal agencies, bonding attorney Lonnie Bewley said.

"This is a program of industrial inducement," Bewley said. "Bonds will be issued on the full faith and credit of the company; the parish will not be liable. You simply are lending your name to the program for them to borrow the money."

If the sale of industrial revenue bonds is approved, the company will begin construction of the first phase—erecting a new salt-drying complex—in January 1980, said Stuart J. Leisz, assistant vice president of Cargill's salt division.

That work would be completed by mid-1980, he said, adding construction won't infringe on present mining operations.

The project also includes construction of a new brine purification system, a new brine evaporation system, installation of $300,000 worth of pollution control equipment, erection of a processing building to screen, pellet and package salt and construction of a new warehouse. By 1983 the new plant should be operative, Leisz said, increasing the present 50-member work force to 66.

"When the new multi-effect evaporators are installed, we will double fuel efficiency by using steam four times instead of twice as we do now," Leisz said.

"This modernization and expansion will enable us to provide evaporated salt that is unexcelled in chemical purity, and is ideally suited for use by the textile, chemical and food processing industries," he said.

Merle Johnson, manager of the Breaux Bridge salt mine, said the new drying equipment will be the first of its kind to be installed in the United States.

"Our engineers in Minnesota did an extensive study of a European drying method and found it to be energy-saving and less complicated (than Cargill's present system)," Johnson said.

Cargill acquired the Breaux Bridge plant from Gordy Salt Company in 1971 and has been extracting salt by the evaporation method since then.

Evaporated salt production involves forcing water under high pressure down a deep well drilled into a salt deposit. The brine created is then pumped to the surface and evaporated, purified and dried before being packaged and sold.