



BROADEN GOALS, COUNTY TOLD; CONSULTANT SAYS BIOTECHNOLOGY WILL HAVE LIMITED EFFECT

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A consulting firm warned yesterday that Forsyth County needs to concentrate on more than biotechnology to fuel its economic-development engine.

Angelos Angelou, the founder of AngelouEconomics, challenged economic and community leaders to think beyond biotechnology and aim at such budding sectors as design technology and nanotechnology, which is the application of scientific technology on a microscopic level.

Angelou said he is encouraged by the expansion plans for the Piedmont Triad Research Park, but he urged the community not to put all of its economic-development eggs into just a biotechnology basket.

"Everyone in the U.S. is trying to attract its share of the \$28.5 billion biotechnology pie at a time when the industry is consolidating," Angelou said. There are at least 15 communities much closer to breakthroughs in biotechnology economic development than Forsyth County, he said.

Having Wake Forest University's School of Medicine as a resource allows Winston-Salem to be a player in biotechnology, but the city has a long way to go before it develops a biotech cluster similar to those in Research Triangle Park and San Diego, he said.

Angelou's biotechnology comments are likely to spur some rethinking of the county's economic efforts, said Gayle Anderson, the president of the Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce.

"I was really impressed with the depth of this report because he gave us a good starting point for new economic initiatives to consider," said Anderson, who recently criticized inaccuracies in an earlier draft report by AngelouEconomics on Forsyth County.

"We have been looking at biomanufacturing as a key component of our strategy," Anderson said. "Angelos was suggesting that it might have a smaller impact range that we had thought, so we will have to review those plans and take a closer look at how niche technology strategies fit our community."

Local officials already have tempered their initial expectations that companies moving into the park would create 10,000 high-paying jobs in the next 10 to 15 years, as well as add \$5 million a year in property-tax revenue and put \$2.5 billion into the local economy.

Angelou said that Forsyth County could direct its biotech focus into sectors that are viable and have less competition. One example is the bioinformatics sector, which involves using computer research to speed up the gleaning of information, primarily for the health-care-services industry.

"There is more growth potential on the service side of biotechnology than the labs, and those services will only explode in the future," Angelou said. He said that the bioinformatics sector could be a \$7 billion industry by 2007, with 20,000 jobs created.

Since February, AngelouEconomics has been conducting a \$280,000 study of an eight-county region of Northwest North Carolina. It plans to announce individual county recommendations in late September, but has backed off plans for a regional overview because county officials have chosen to focus on local efforts.

"Economic development is going to have to be rethought here and re-energized to achieve the results you desire and set the region in a new direction," Angelou said. "I have not seen this region be as aggressive as it could be. You are reacting to events instead of driving them."

Bob Leak, the president of Winston-Salem Business Inc., said that there is no question that county economic-development groups could be more aggressive in their efforts.

"We have to get our homework done and our infrastructure in place first, and that takes more resources," Leak said. "The community has made many strides in these efforts. But we need to be in a position that when aggressive marketing is done, we are able to back up what we're presenting."

Identifying and nurturing technological diamonds in the rough will be Forsyth's stiffest and potentially most rewarding challenge, Angelou said.

He identified design and software technology as potential avenues for economic recruitment and expansion.

Establishing a visual-arts program at the N.C. School of the Arts would help the region stand out in attracting small- to-medium-size design and software technology companies, Angelou said. Those companies are developing products with applications in most industries, especially those that use film, animation, graphic arts or simulations.

"A program of 200 to 300 student-artists trained in computer skills would give Winston-Salem a unique presence in the design community," Angelou said.

Creating an industry cluster around design companies would attract more young professionals and technology companies, Angelou said.

He said that those companies typically won't look at a region unless at least 30 percent of its population is between the ages 25 and 45. Angelou encouraged officials to look internationally in business-recruitment efforts, especially when marketing the proposed FedEx cargo hub at Piedmont Triad International Airport.

He said that the region needs to collaborate more on marketing its outdoors appeal, saying that hiking and biking trails are more attractive to young professionals than golf courses.

TOP TARGETS

Consulting firm AngelouEconomics said that Forsyth County should concentrate on these five industries for economic development:

- Biotechnology
- Design and software technology
- Logistics and distribution
- Hospitality and tourism
- Transportation equipment