

Ford's Tenn. plant could make 500K electric pickups a year

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Ford CEO Jim Farley talks about a new Ford electric pickup truck factory that is currently under construction in rural Tennessee on Friday, March 24, 2023 in Stanton, Tenn. Credit: AP Photo/Adrian Sainz

Ford said Friday that its assembly plant under construction in western Tennessee will be able to build up to 500,000 electric pickup trucks a year at full output, part of the automaker's drive to produce 2 million electric vehicles worldwide annually by late 2026.

The company made the announcement as it provided updates on the so-called BlueOval City project at an event attended by Ford executives, project leaders, politicians and residents who live near the sprawling Tennessee site.

The Dearborn, Michigan, automaker announced the project in September of 2021 that would build the truck plant and a battery factory on 3,600 acres (1,460-hectares) in rural Stanton, located in Haywood County northeast of Memphis. Known as the Memphis Regional Megasite, the land designated by the state for industrial development sat unused for years before Ford moved in.

Ford's assembly plant, and the battery plant run by South Korean battery maker SK On, will employ about 6,000 people with an investment of roughly \$5.6 billion, Ford said.

The joint venture will also construct twin battery plants in Glendale, Kentucky, with an estimated \$5.8 billion investment. The projects are expected to create more than 10,800 jobs and shift the automaker's future manufacturing footprint toward the South while putting an emphasis on green energy.

Construction on the Tennessee site began last year. Ford plans to start production by 2025, and that timetable remains in place, company officials said

Construction is about 50% complete, said Donna Langford, Ford's project manager. Media members who joined a bus tour of the site in the

rain Friday saw steel skeletons of the massive, partially built structures that will house the battery plant and the truck assembly factory. Once finished, the site will also include a Tennessee Valley Authority substation to help power the plants and a Tennessee College of Applied Technology, where workforce training will take place.

The automaker said its second-generation electric truck is "code named Project T3," and Ford CEO Jim Farley touted the truck's simplified design and high-quality technology.

Ford did not release images of the new truck during the event, but it did display colorful drawings made by Tennessee schoolchildren with suggestions for its design—including some trucks that would fly.

In a reference to the fast and tough Star Wars ship, Farley said the new truck "is going to be like the Millennium Falcon, with a back porch attached."

Speaking with reporters, Farley acknowledged that the Tennessee truck factory would be the most environmentally friendly new plant Ford has ever built.

"Not even close," said Farley, adding later that "this is a new industrial revolution about clean, carbon neutral manufacturing."

Ford says the plant is designed to be its first carbon-neutral vehicle manufacturing campus. It will have a 30% smaller general assembly footprint than traditional plants by simplifying sub-assemblies and reducing the number of stations on the line, Farley said.

"We shrunk the plant because we have less people, we have less stations," Farley said.

Ford also said it will use recovered energy from the site to provide carbon-free heat for the assembly plant and save water by reducing evaporation from the site's cooling towers.

Before landing the Ford project, Tennessee had invested more than \$174 million in the unused Memphis megasite. Tennessee lawmakers have committed to spending nearly \$900 million on state incentives, infrastructure upgrades and more as part of a sweeping plan with Ford. The agreement included \$500 million in capital grant funds.

The lease essentially grants the land to Ford through December 2051. The rent is \$1 for the entire lease term.

Some of the rural West Tennessee counties surrounding the plant hope it will help boost their economies.

With an economy based largely on farming, Haywood County saw its population shrink by 4.9% to 17,864 people from 2010 to 2020, one of 14 counties to lose population as Tennessee grew as a whole by 8.9%, according to census data.

The factory is expected to bring both small and large businesses to the area, including hotels, restaurants, health care facilities and suppliers for the plant, among others. Real estate values also could increase.

Ford's leaders have pledged to help the communities near the plant. The Ford Motor Company Fund announced Friday it has awarded 17 grants of \$75,000 to \$100,000 each to fire departments, arts and parks conservancy groups, a community center, local governments and other organizations in six counties.

The \$1.2 million grant program received 200 applications, said Mary Culler, president of the Ford Motor Company Fund.

"Those are the kinds of grass-roots, capital projects that these towns and municipalities are looking for," Culler said.

As it seeks to develop its workforce in Tennessee, Ford said it has begun a talent development program that will support STEM instruction in K-12 schools, bring advanced manufacturing education to schools, and expand certification, dual-enrollment and internship opportunities for students.

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