Coca-Cola Bottlers Dedicate Production Capability to Support COVID-19 Test Kits

June 1, 2020

CHARLOTTE, N.C., June 01, 2020 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Coca-Cola Consolidated, Inc. (NASDAQ:COKE) today announced that Southeastern Container, a PET preform and bottle manufacturing co-operative funded and managed by a group of Coca-Cola bottlers, has begun producing test tubes for use in COVID-19 kits. Utilizing several injection molding preform tools, the manufacturing co-operative has already produced over 7 million tubes for testing kits.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services collaborated with Oak Ridge National Lab to identify manufacturers who could address a supply chain gap of COVID-19 test collection tubes to support the increasing testing needs of States. Lonnie Love, lead scientist for Oak Ridge National Laboratory's COVID-19 advanced manufacturing initiatives said, "When the US Dept. of Health and Human Services reached out to ORNL for assistance in finding a COVID-19 test tube solution, we considered several options to help industry scale up production. Through a personal connection and discussions with Coca-Cola Consolidated, we determined the preform that goes into a blow molding machine to make Coca-Cola bottles looked exactly like the test tube needed for the COVID-19 testing kits."

At ORNL's request, Coca-Cola Consolidated provided samples of their preforms and the laboratory worked with COVID-19 testing company Longhorn Vaccine-Diagnostics to confirm that the tubes met test kit criteria.

"There is a global shortage of cryotubes available to meet the need for our PrimeStore Molecular Transport Medium, said Dr. Luke T. Daum, Chief Scientific Officer at Longhorn Vaccines. "Coke bottlers have done what no other vialing company could do—In a few short days, they have fabricated a small, ruggedized vial from a plastic preform that does not leak, is large enough to hold any swab type, and importantly, they can make millions of tubes per week," said Daum.

"Within 24 hours Longhorn called us and said, "Coke is it!'" Love said. "It's this type of collaboration that shows the true impact of industry and national laboratories working together. ORNL and Coca-Cola bottlers solved a huge problem. Coca-Cola bottlers had an answer to a problem they did not know existed, and by connection with ORNL, they will now be supplying millions of preforms for COVID-19 testing kits throughout the US."

"In every community across our country, the local Coca-Cola bottler has always been active in serving its community – and this crisis is no different," said Dave Katz, President & COO of Coca-Cola Consolidated, the largest Coca-Cola bottler in the U.S. "Through a series of personal connections, we discovered the opportunity to contribute to the effort to increase COVID-19 testing capacity quickly. For over a hundred years, our family of Coca-Cola bottlers has been honing the production process to serve consumers, and we are honored and excited to pivot that expertise to helping keep Americans safe and healthy."

Researchers at the Department of Energy's Manufacturing Demonstration Facility at Oak Ridge National Laboratory worked with Coca-Cola Consolidated to determine whether soda bottle preforms, which are small plastic tubes heated and blown into a bottle shape to hold carbonated beverages, can be used as test tubes in COVID-19 kits. These kits include a swab, saline solution and a plastic tube to enclose the swab during transport. Soda bottle preforms are the perfect size to hold the long COVID-19 swab. The soda bottle preforms also contain a screw-top cap that is tamper-proof and safely seals the tube, preventing leakage and exposure during transport.

Once the test tubes are produced, sterilization is usually required before they can be used in test kits. Sandia National Laboratories, a Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration lab with headquarters in Albuquerque, N.M., is using its Gamma Irradiation Facility and a team of radiation science experts to develop protocols for sterilizing the preforms without damaging the materials.

"This collaboration is going to be key for plugging gaps in the supply chain for COVID-19 tests," said Randy Schunk, lead engineer for Sandia's COVID-19 advanced manufacturing projects. "Gamma irradiation is an efficient and common way to sterilize medical supplies in bulk. Sandia is doing the research and development to find the right level of gamma radiation to sterilize the tubes without damaging the components, plastic or the tubes' seals."

Sandia's protocols will be shared with medical sterilization facilities around the country that receive tubes from Southeastern Container to sterilize.

ORNL engaged a diagnostic company, Longhorn Vaccines-Diagnostics in San Antonio, Texas to confirm that the soda bottle preforms are compatible with their COVID-19 testing systems. Five testing companies that conduct COVID-19 tests within the US are currently in line to begin using the preforms. ORNL conducted additional testing on the tubes confirming that the preforms were leak proof and that bacteria growth could be prevented by heating to a high temperature or cleaning with an ethanol solution.

The preforms will be manufactured by Southeastern Container (SEC), based in North Carolina, which is a co-operative funded and managed by a group of Coca-Cola bottlers. SEC can produce over 7 million test tubes per week, helping to reach US testing goals.

ORNL's collection tube manufacturing research efforts are conducted in coordination with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and funded in part by the DOE Office of Science through the National Virtual Biotechnology Laboratory, a consortium of DOE national laboratories focused on response to COVID-19, with funding provided by the Coronavirus CARES Act.

For illustration of the Coca-Cola bottling process, using preforms as test tubes, please visit:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uk6HIifwwY8&feature=youtu.be

About Coca-Cola Consolidated, Inc.

Coca-Cola Consolidated is the largest Coca-Cola bottler in the United States. Our Purpose is to honor God, serve others, pursue excellence and grow profitably. For 118 years, we have been deeply committed to the consumers, customers and communities we serve and passionate about the broad portfolio of beverages and services we offer. We make, sell and deliver beverages of The Coca-Cola Company and other partner companies in more than 300 brands and flavors to approximately 66 million consumers in territories spanning 14 states and the District of Columbia. Headquartered in Charlotte, NC, Coca-Cola Consolidated is traded on the NASDAQ Global Select Market under the symbol "COKE." More information about the Company is available at www.cokeconsolidated.com. Contact: Kimberly Kuo, Kimberly.Kuo@cokeconsolidated.com, 704-557-4584.

About Southeastern Container, Inc. (SEC) – Formed as a co-operative by a group of independent Coca- Cola bottlers to produce PET packaging in the early 80's, SEC has grown to be one of the world's largest and most respected PET processors. Today, SEC ships PET preforms and bottles to over 50 Coca-Cola bottling and co-packing operations in the United States and Canada, covering 34 states and six Canadian provinces. With headquarters in North Carolina, SEC has other locations in Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and a second location in North Carolina. www.secontainer.com/ Contact: Doug Wehrkamp, President, djw@secontainer.com, 828-775-2966.

About Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) – UT-Battelle manages ORNL for the Department of Energy's Office of Science. The Office of Science is the single largest supporter of basic research in the physical sciences in the United States and is working to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time. For more information, please visit https://energy.gov/science/. Contact: Jennifer Burke, burkeji@ornl.gov, 865-414-6835.

About Sandia National Laboratories – Sandia National Laboratories is a multimission laboratory operated by National Technology and Engineering Solutions of Sandia LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Honeywell International Inc., for the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration. Sandia Labs has major research and development responsibilities in nuclear deterrence, global security, defense, energy technologies and economic competitiveness, with main facilities in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Livermore, California. For more information, visit https://www.sandia.gov/news/index.html. Contact: Kristen Meub, klmeub@sandia.gov, 505-239-1671.

About Longhorn Vaccines and Diagnostics - Longhorn Vaccines & Diagnostics is an innovative molecular tool, assay and vaccine development company focused on serving unmet critical needs in both developed and developing nations. Longhorn's core product, PrimeStore® Molecular Transport Medium (MTM), is a patented, FDA approved, state-of-the-art ambient temperature molecular diagnostic collection and transport device that can help governments, global health organizations and drug manufacturers improve the diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases such as mycobacterium tuberculosis (TB) and Influenza. Unlike standard devices for collecting and transporting TB samples, PrimeStore® MTM is the first molecular transport device that can safely deactivate pathogens and stabilize RNA and DNA, allowing enhanced point of care and ambient temperature transport for laboratory based molecular testing and characterization. Longhorn is based in Bethesda, Maryland with the research and development facility in San Antonio, Texas. Contact: Jeff Fischer, President, jeff@lhnvd.com, (301) 233-1551.

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Source: Coca-Cola Consolidated, Inc.