RI BUSINESS

Edesia Nutrition expands R.I. factory making therapeutic food for malnourished children, despite Trump foreign aid cuts

The family of Jacklyn and Miguel "Mike" Bezos provided $137 million to more than triple the size of the North Kingstown plant, and provide food to prevent malnutrition around the world

By Edward Fitzpatrick Globe Staff, Updated October 23, 2026, 2 hours ago



Navyn Salem, founder and CEO of Edesia Nutrition, speaks during a ceremony marking the expansion of the nonprofit's factory in North Kingstown, R.I., on Oct. 22, 2026. MARY DOWDLE

NORTH KINGSTOWN, R.I. — Edesia Nutrition has expanded the size of its North Kingstown factory by 3.5 times, allowing it to provide life-saving food to 10 million children each year around the world, the nonprofit's leaders announced Thursday.

The expansion took place place despite the Trump administration's dismantling of the US Agency for International Development, which had provided a large chunk of Edesia's funding in a past years.

The growth was possible because the family of Jacklyn and Miguel "Mike" Bezos, the late mother and adoptive father of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, provided $137 million to the social enterprise.

And despite the supply chain disruptions caused by the slashing of the foreign aid program, Edesia has figured out ways to get its peanut-based products in Rhode Island to the places they're needed, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

"Why did we build this factory?" Edesia founder and CEO Navyn Salem asked during a ceremony Thursday. "To say that a child, no matter where they are born, must have access to food and nutrition to prove to the world that we can end a protracted problem. It is time to end malnutrition."



The offices of Edesia Nutrition in the Quonset Business Park in North Kingstown, R.I. EDWARD FITZPATRICK

Last year, hundreds of thousands of boxes of Edesia's life-saving peanut-based nutritional paste were sitting in warehouses as Elon Musk began dismantling USAID, and Edesia was forced to lay off 16 employees.

But now Edesia, named for the Roman goddess of food, has expanded its North Kingstown factory from 85,000 square feet to 300,000 square feet, Salem said. That will allow the company to hire 50 new employees, bringing its workforce to 200. Since 2010, Edesia has reached 32 million children in more than 65 countries, and now it will be able to reach 10 million children each year, she said.

Salem said that when USAID was being dismantled, she called the Bezos family, asking what they wanted her to do with the funding they had announced back in 2023.

She said they would always tell her: “Just keep building. We know there’s children that are in need. If it changes the way that we deliver it or the way that we work, that’s OK. But they’re still there, and the need is still urgent. So keep building.”

Amid last year’s cuts and delays, Edesia found ways to not just produce the food, but get it to its destination, whether in Afghanistan or Sierra Leone, Salem said.



Sugar silos at the Edesia Nutrition factory in North Kingstown, R.I. EDWARD FITZPATRICK

“We are no longer a producer of life-saving foods and part of the puzzle,” she said. “We are practically every piece of the puzzle now.” That means building partnerships, raising money, and setting up warehouses in West Africa, East Africa, the Middle East, she said.

“If a road is blocked, we have planes, we have ferries, we have everything you can think of to make sure that that food makes it to where it needs to go,” Salem said. “We do last mile. We have to do it all. Why? Because children can’t wait, and nobody else is going to show up to do it.”

Also, Edesia is shifting from treating malnutrition to preventing it from happening in the first place, Salem said. So it has invested in equipment to make a preventative product, called Nutributter, in addition to the fortified peanut-based paste, Plumpy’Nut, that treats severe cases of malnutrition.

“A severely malnourished child’s arm is the size of a quarter,” Salem said, holding up a quarter. If a child’s arm is larger than that, they often get turned away under current protocols, she explained.



Navyn Salem, founder and CEO of Edesia Nutrition, leads a tour of the factory in North Kingstown, R.I., on Oct. 22, 2026. EDWARD FITZPATRICK

“From now on, every child at the age of six months, a healthy baby will start to get this one per day for six months,” she said, holding up packet of Nutributter. “It costs 8 cents. Can you think of a better intervention? So this factory was built for prevention.”

Salem said Edesia fought through a tough period because it believes that feeding children has long been a bipartisan issue. And she said Edesia has shown it “knows how to do aid well,” by bidding competitively, showing clear returns on investment, conducting research on what works, and buying raw materials in the United States.

“We’re American manufacturing at its best, and we get to find these little boxes that say “From Rhode Island” in the farthest corners of the earth," she said.

Three members of Rhode Island’s Democratic congressional delegation spoke — and took part in a dance celebration — at Thursday’s ceremony.

US Senator Jack Reed said the measure of a society is not its economic progress or military power. The true measure, he said, “is its contribution to the human spirit, its contribution to helping people across the globe. Edesia is committed to helping children survive, and it is a symbol of the best of America — the very best of America.”



US Senator Jack Reed, center, takes part in a dance celebration during a ceremony marking the expansion of the Edesia Nutrition factory in North Kingstown, R.I. MARY DOWDLE

US Representative Seth Magaziner — who spoke on the House floor 42 times to demand restoration of federal funding for the nutritional paste made by Edesia — said, “We’re not out of the woods yet. The administration is still not behaving the way that they should be. We as a country still don’t have the right priorities.”

While the federal budget for ready-to-use therapeutic food is about $300 million a year, the United States is spending a billion dollars a day on the war in Iran, Magaziner said. “Imagine if we were investing that money in these kids, in these families — the number of lives that we could save,” he said.

US Representative Gabe Amo, the son of West African immigrants and Rhode Island's first Black congressman, said, "I can't think of a better example of American leadership than what we're doing here today — of your work to ensure that children don't die of preventable deaths."

The United States has long filled the role of "being that beacon of light" in the world, but other considerations, such as war and partisanship, are getting in the way, he said.

Edesia's work is not just about compassion, Amo said. "Compassion is there, but it strengthens partnerships, supports global health, and helps prevent instability before it spreads," he said.

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