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Incentives for Boeing now paying off \$20.6 million defense contract bringing less than 20 jobs to Heath

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HEATH -- Two years ago, the Heath-Newark-Licking Port Authority, the state of Ohio and local governments created about \$2 million in incentives to help Boeing relocate a key defense program here.

That investment was more than validated Tuesday.

Boeing obtained a \$20.6 million contract increase to build advanced antennae systems for the U.S. Air Force at its Heath plant. The program was moved to Heath in 2006 after the incentives came through.

The Airborne Warning and Control System-Electronic Systems Measures systems will be built between September 2008 and January 2010, company spokeswoman Dawn Pettit said. About 53 of the high-tech systems will be built.

The program, known by its acronyms, AWACS and ESM, was moved in 2006 to Heath from Corinth, Texas. Many of the employees came north with the program, Pettit said.

"AWACS is a strong part of our business, and it shows the customer's confidence in us," Pettit said.

The contract marks a 20 percent increase from past contracts and will require the creation of more jobs, Pettit said. The company expects to create less than the 20 jobs mentioned in some reports, however.

The increase solidifies Boeing's place in Heath.

"The state and local government, the county and city and the Port Authority, we all went in to package some incentives," Port Authority Executive Director Rick Platt said. "It validates the work that we all did years ago."

The AWACS system is a passive sensor package that allows operators to detect, identify and track electronic transmissions from the ground, air or sea, Pettit said. The system can detect signals as weak as a cell phone, she said.

The systems will be mounted on Air Force planes. The ESM program is exclusive to Heath; meanwhile, AWACS systems also are built in Boeing's Seattle plant.

Boeing also earned a \$3.6 million, two-year contract for ESM repairs earlier this year. The company added ESM to the system in the early 1990s.

The ESM system allows operators to determine radar and weapon system type, above and beyond the signal tracking capability.

The Heath plant also does repair and calibration of guidance and navigation systems for missiles. The plant is at The Base, an industrial park that once was a U.S. Air Force base.
