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Programs and Opportunities

World Community Focuses on Africa

By Mary Rekas

Since Congress enacted AGOA (the African Growth and Opportunity Act) in 2000, a framework has been in place to support the growth of democracy and economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Reform is the ticket for entry, and 37 African countries are now AGOA-eligible.

AGOA opens the U.S. marketplace to duty-free imports of African goods. It also supports investment, linkages and trade capacity building programs to help African economies. And positive results are already evident.

In 2000, before implementation of AGOA, eligible countries exported \$716.6 million worth of agricultural products to the United States. By 2004, that trade had risen 41 percent, to more than \$1 billion.

On the Ground With USDA

USDA has been supporting African agribusinesses with programs designed to develop trade capacity.

What is trade capacity building? It's international collaboration that assists with development of regulations, policies, institutions and infrastructure that facilitate trade.

Agricultural technical training programs include many how-to's — creating SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) standards and regulations for foods to meet international requirements, pest risk assessments, marketing techniques and technology transfer.

USDA provides seminars on how to meet the World Trade Organization's SPS standards. USDA experts in three Global Competitiveness Hubs managed by USAID (the U.S. Agency for International Development) — in Botswana, Uganda and Ghana — are working closely with African officials and producers to establish pest risk assessments for agricultural commodities destined for the U.S. market.

Two science and technology conferences, in Burkina Faso and Mali, have raised awareness about sustainable agricultural practices and the promise of biotechnology.

The U.S. private sector has also made important contributions. The National Cotton Council of America has been working with representatives of the West African cotton sector to implement current production technology, market their products and integrate their cotton industry with textile production.

An African Summer

There is renewed determination in the United States to raise agriculture productivity among African nations, which have often been beset with war, famine, drought, disease, debt and political corruption.

Africa has long been a destination for food aid. While feeding the hungry will always be a priority for the United States, there is a new international focus on helping African nations achieve improved food security through increased agricultural productivity and trade.

The President's MCA (Millennium Challenge Account) Initiative will invest in agricultural development, education, private sector development, governance, health and trade capacity building in many countries.

Eight MCA countries are in sub-Saharan Africa. Madagascar was the first African country approved with a funding compact for \$110 million over four years.

This summer, the world community focused on Africa's plight. The G8 countries, led by United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair, committed to increase aid to Africa by \$25 billion a year by 2010, fight malaria among African children and enhance the Africa Union's ability to deploy a stabilizing force. The pop music world also contributed proceeds from the nine LIVE 8 concerts on July 2, 2005.

Deliverables in the Works

USDA and USAID are developing a trade enhancement program that will include private and public sectors. This

collaboration will smooth the entry of African fresh fruits and vegetables into the global market by improving African phytosanitary standards.

Also later this year, USDA will sponsor a trade and investment mission to the Southern African region. The mission will encourage joint ventures, support bilateral trade and boost investment in the region's rich agricultural sector. More missions are planned for other regions in Africa in 2006.

USDA has also been working with the ADB (African Development Bank) and the Africa Business Roundtable on a new program to encourage agricultural investments. The ADB has a private sector program for equipment loans.

Collaboration Yields Results

Two USDA initiatives, the Cochran Fellowship Program and the Norman E. Borlaug International Agricultural Science and Technology Fellows Program, provide short-term technical training in the United States for public and private professionals from eligible countries.

The Cochran program, active since the mid-1980s, trained 106 participants from sub-Saharan Africa in 2004. Training opportunities in the agricultural industry include agricultural trade, marketing, management, policy and technology transfer.

The Borlaug Program, a faculty and scientist exchange program, was begun in 2004 following the first USDA/USAID-sponsored Ministerial Conference and Expo on Agricultural Science and Technology in Sacramento, Calif. It provides short-term scientific training for international agricultural research scientists and policymakers.

Currents of Freedom

The United States has a long-term commitment to growth and development in Africa. With open economies and free markets, the pathway to prosperity can be accelerated for many countries.

Shared goals of the United States and AGOA governments, businesses and other interested groups are to ensure increased exports, investment opportunities, employment, and income in each country.

Expanding trade and investment tend to accompany economic and social reform. There is a growing realization among African

International Dialogue

International events serve an important function in increasing awareness in U.S. and African businesses of the expanding opportunities for African products.

- In 2005, the G8 and the African Union/New Partnership for Africa's Development sponsored a continent-wide summit on the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program.
- In June, the Corporate Council on Africa U.S.-Africa Business Summit focused on strengthening trade and investment ties between the United States and Africa.
- In July, the Fourth AGOA conference in Senegal brought together U.S. and African delegates from the private and public sectors to form partnerships conducive to trade and investment.

leaders that sustained growth and development can only occur in open economies with an active private sector.

The United States plans to help that reform process in Africa, step-by-step — to create a political and economic environment where individual freedom and growing prosperity are the rule, not the exception. ■

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