

CONSIDER EXPORTING ...

By: Ray Rafie* and Joe Garofalo*

Traditionally South Florida agriculture has geared its production toward the domestic market. With the ongoing effort to expand the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the farming communities of South Florida see themselves on one side threatened by offshore competition and on another side threatened by the pressure from urban development.

Many growers consider farming an illusive and unprofitable business. Some continue farming to carry on the family tradition with the idea of surviving, while others farm as a hobby or as a secondary job.

Reduction of the production areas of tomatoes and potatoes is an indication that new strategies are needed to keep farming in Miami-Dade County a viable industry.

Aggressive marketing, ethnic crops for niche markets, and value-added products are often mentioned as relatively easy solutions to a very complex problem. However, one area that is not being mentioned enough is the export of agricultural products from South Florida.

It may appear illogical to discuss exporting as a partial solution in a community in which agriculture is being threatened by importing, but there are many reasons to believe that exporting can be a viable alternative for our agricultural products.

For example, lets take the Caribbean countries, where there are 28 nations, with a population of 27 million people. The Caribbean is the world region most dependent on agricultural imports, especially when it comes to consumer-oriented products.

Tourism, the number one employer and income-generating activity in the region, plays a large role in fueling the demand for imported agricultural products.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) reports a total of 16.7 million international tourist arrivals in the Caribbean during 2001. Many of these tourists are staying in the more luxurious hotels, and they expect the best fresh fruits and vegetables to make their vacation more delightful.

Efforts are underway by land developers to design and build new tropical attractions, and no matter what type of

attractions they decide to build, these attractions will require tropical landscape plants.

Most local residents watch cable television, primarily U.S. channels, and have learned the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables to their health.

With "Made in the USA" recognized as a seal of guarantee for quality, people all over the world will pay premier prices to purchase American-made goods, which includes automobiles, Washington apples, California navel oranges or, as we wish, Florida lychees and landscape plants.

U.S. trade data indicate that the Caribbean is the seventh largest market for U.S. consumer-oriented agricultural products.

In 2001 U.S. exports of consumer-oriented products to the region reached nearly \$596 million.

Of this amount, processed fruits and vegetables accounted for \$52 million, fresh fruits and vegetables for \$48.7 million, and nursery products and cut flowers for \$8.5 million.

There is no doubt that the United States holds an enviable trade position in the Caribbean. "With the cheapest transportation costs, the greatest array of products and a high level of quality, the United States is essentially trading in its own backyard" according to USDA's *AgExporter* magazine.

Moreover, Caribbean nations also represent key growing markets for the three most important agricultural industries in South Florida, which are nursery products, tropical fruits, and vegetables.

USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and the Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) have worked diligently for many years to facilitate accessing markets in the Caribbean.

FAS' Caribbean Basin Agricultural Trade Office (CBATO) in Miami has a variety of programs and services geared toward helping U.S. suppliers market their products in the Caribbean.

For more information on CBATO programs and services, you may contact CBATO Director Mrs. Margie Bauer, at (305) 536-5300 or by e-mail cbato@attglobal.net. The CBATO

website also serves as an excellent starting point for any U.S. supplier interested in exporting to the Caribbean.

SUSTA has programs that financially support American firms in promoting their products in Latin America in general and more specifically in the Caribbean.

For example, if yours is an agricultural company interested in exporting your products, SUSTA administers a cost reimbursement program (MAP Branded). This program provides up to 50% of your expenses for various approved branded product promotions; and conducts numerous trade activities (i.e., trade missions, market research, in-store promotions) to provide southern agricultural and food processors with opportunities to sell their products.

SUSTA has offices in many countries that can help American firms locate business opportunities overseas. For more information about SUSTA, contact Executive Director Mr. Jim Ake by phone at (504) 568-5986 or visit the SUSTA website at www.susta.org.

To strengthen those companies that have experience with exporting, and to train those that are willing to export, but have not done so, the University of Florida is joining with Miami-Dade Community College, the Florida Department of

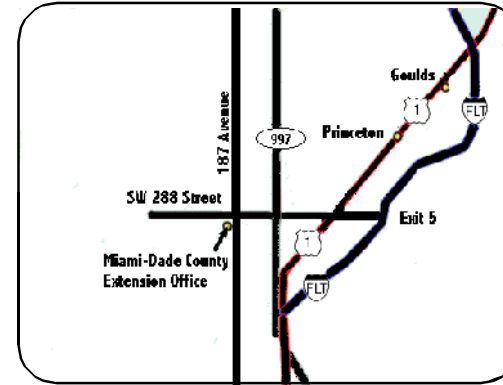
Agriculture and Consumer Services, the CBATO and SUSTA to offer a multi-session seminar to provide South Florida growers, shippers and wholesalers with the 'A' to 'Z' of exporting.

The locations and the times of these seminars will be announced in the near future. If you are a grower, shipper, or wholesaler and have quality products, remember that globalization does not have to squeeze South Florida products out of the market. Look for alternatives and please consider the export market.

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In Writing

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