

A number of initiatives are being developed in collaboration with the banks and with the federal government's own financing agency, the Export Development Corporation (EDC).

One such program will provide better access to working capital by facilitating the extension of operating lines of credit to exporters against their foreign receivables.

Another program will provide medium-term financing for exports. Banks will be able to provide medium-term buyer financing with a partial EDC guarantee for certain types of transactions in a large number of developing countries.

Most recently, the Export Development Corporation launched a new program targeting small-business clients. An EDC business team, accessible via a toll-free number, is dedicated to serving their unique export credit insurance and financing needs.

In my own department, our long-standing Program for Export Market Development (PEMD) is now centred on smaller enterprises. And financial assistance for government-sponsored trade fairs is now only available to smaller firms, on a cost-shared basis. Furthermore, participation in business missions and support for larger companies participating in trade fairs is now on a full cost-recovery basis.

While we are working on these initiatives to improve the access of smaller businesses to our export programs, we must also do more to help prepare them for the rigours of international trade. All exporters, be they new or experienced, require training in international marketing, export financing, foreign commercial and corporate law, culture and languages.

Government has a central role to play in helping to train small businesses, partly through supporting the initiatives of private institutions such as the Forum for International Trade Training (FITT). Both the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and the Calgary Economic Development Authority are to be congratulated for their promotion of the FITT programs.

The Canada-Alberta MOU recognizes the fact that education and training are the most effective means to increase the number of export-ready firms. Bringing companies to the export readiness level is also critical if we are to make optimal use of our own scarce resources abroad. In recent years, an increasing number of companies have been knocking on the doors of our trade commissioners abroad without prior preparation. All too often, answers to their inquiries could or should have been found at home. Just as it is cheaper for a company to gather basic market information from an office in Canada than from a hotel room in Tokyo, it is cheaper for governments to provide basic assistance and training in Canada than from offices abroad.