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Diverse Needs and Approaches

REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN MEXICO

Many Canadian business people have become familiar in recent years with Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara. A few have specialized regional knowledge of other areas because of their particular fields, but to a great number of Canadians, exporters or not, the rest of Mexico is unknown terrain.

But the fact is that Mexico has 31 states and a federal district. It has long Atlantic and Pacific coasts, and a geography that includes mountain communities, deserts, coastal plains, large urban centres, and villages with less population than a high-rise. This is a diverse country with diverse needs and opportunities.

Exporters looking for new opportunities might well consider learning a little about the diversity of Mexico, and about how to approach potential customers, clients or contacts in the area that attracts them. And, although Mexico has been addressing its regional development needs in recent years, it is only now beginning to recognize the potential mutual benefit of its new foreign trade opportunities and its internal development needs.

In Canada, we are used to hearing about various initiatives for the development of one region, one

industry, or one sector. This is a part of modern Mexican program design as well, and the increase in recognition of regional needs in Mexico can open doors to exporters and investors with interests beyond the major financial and business centres.

The Salinas government, which will shortly conclude its six-year term,

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introduced in its early days a National Development Plan. One aspect of this scheme, informally known as Solidaridad, has as its principal objective an attempt to narrow regional disparities. Its major thrusts have been in modernizing and expanding infrastructure, on the rationale that better roads, electricity and the like would aid communities in developing their own resources and strengths. It is intended to be community-responsive, and projects have, in some instances, been undertaken as a result of direct, focussed requests by community governments. The success of the program, which is ongoing, is varied — government officials have acknowledged that the

events in Chiapas were an indication that action was too slow in responding to some needs there — but there are indications elsewhere that many problems have been addressed.

Another way in which the Mexican federal government has moved to encourage regional development is through incentive programs. They are simple in concept: productivity is rewarded, prices regulated or supported in order to assist a region in developing its own resources.

Something relatively new to Mexico, according to the new SECOFI Minister in Ottawa, Jose Poblano, is the plan of the Business Facilitation Centre of the Mexican government to deal directly with the states.

This initiative is at a seminal stage, but its objectives make a lot of sense and will be of value to exporters and investors as it begins to see results. SECOFI is planning a database of information culled from state governors' offices, as well as from those of state trade, public works and finance ministers and of industries located in each state. This will identify their requirements and their resources, so that interested exporters and investors can more directly contact potential business partners or

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