

7.9 The Task Force was told by Canada's trade commissioners about the need for more extensive preparation by Canadian firms that want to become exporters into corridor region markets in the US and Mexico. Without adequate preparation in many instances, Canadian firms cannot make best use of the Canadian trade commission offices. After initial difficulties in market research or failed marketing efforts, some firms have retreated from their intended export markets. It appears that a concerted effort is needed in Canada to prepare prospective exporters before they venture into export markets. Better understanding of the needs of potential exporters would be particularly useful for the several public sector and business organizations involved in trade promotion. A study of this issue led by Western Economic Diversification could quickly draw together the governmental and private sector resources needed for this task.

Recommendation

Create a joint government-business study to identify the preparation and information needs of prospective Canadian exporters, with a focus on markets across the corridor region in the US and Mexico, to enable firms to establish their export-ready capabilities.

7.10 Canadian firms appear to have difficulties accessing the market research and export opportunities information they need to become more active exporters into the corridor region. While there are various information sources and government programs to assist potential exporters, there is often a high cost involved for Canadian firms in the initial stages of assessing export markets. The level of awareness in the business community about the availability and types of programs appears to be insufficient, and many firms are unaware of the sources which can supply market information or the extent of available information. Existing export readiness programs should be enhanced with emphasis on publicizing information sources and expansion of new exporters' trade missions.

Recommendation

Expand resources for publicity to Canadian industry on the availability of export information sources and existing programs in order to increase the number of export ready companies and enable expansion of new exporters' missions to US and Mexican markets.

7.11 The example of the Alliance multimodal air/container port in Texas illustrated to the Task Force the kind of public and private sector partnership that is sometimes necessary to establish a new facility in spite of the initial reluctance of some participants. The rapid growth in the use of containers for multimodal transportation and the need for joint investment in facilities to handle them were highly instructive. While the location of such a facility might be controversial in Winnipeg, the economic benefits would appear to be substantial and would enable the city and the province to become more competitive as a transportation hub. The creation of a central container port in Winnipeg appears to be an essential ingredient in any plan for the long-term viability of the city as an efficient gateway.