

U.S. Senate Committee for Small Business & Entrepreneurship  
Field Hearing, June 30, 2009

TESTIMONY  
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Good afternoon. Thank you, Senator Landrieu, for the opportunity to testify as part of this panel. Export sales have meant a great deal to my company and my family, and I look forward to telling you a bit about my experience.

I got into the export business over 20 years ago, and I can truly say that every day has been a learning experience. Selling internationally isn't easy. One of the keys to my success has been learning about the resources that can help small companies like mine export profitably.

My experience in international business started in my native Honduras, when I marketed products from Honduras to the U.S. and Europe. Years later I came to America and started selling supermarket equipment overseas with Interamerica Sales. Next I worked as an Executive Sales Representative for Albert Rebel & Associates out of California. I ran their New Orleans branch until 2000, when I decided to start my own company. Relying on my experience in the supermarket supply industry, I decided to create a business based entirely on sales to Central, South America and the Caribbean.

Today, my company, International Export Sales, LLC has grown to five employees. We are a Louisiana Limited Liability Company, classified as an Export Trading Company. We specialize in the purchase and resale of U.S. manufactured supermarket equipment, commercial refrigeration equipment and light industrial refrigeration equipment to Latin America and the Caribbean. We offer our customers everything from shopping carts to freezer display units, and many things in between.

We maintain customer relationships with over 200 international clients comprised primarily of foreign supermarket chains, resellers, and distributors. We also sell to bakeries, hotels, and convenience stores.

Our staff has over 30 years of experience in the export business. Even so, I've found that it always pays to know outside experts who can help in tricky situations. One of the wonderful things about being an entrepreneur in the U.S. is the wide array of government resources to help companies sell internationally. I've used a number of these; today I would like to talk in particular about the U.S. Commercial Service and Ex-Im Bank.

I always say that customer service is the cornerstone of our business. In fact, our desire to better serve our customers is what led us to work with Ex-Im Bank in

the first place. We currently have an export credit insurance policy with Ex-Im. This allows us to extend better terms of credit to our buyers – and limit risk to our small company.

In today's competitive global economy, I've found that deals can be won and lost because of financing. We have increased our sales by providing open account terms to our best international customers. For example, just a few months ago we won a major sale in Honduras with the help of Ex-Im credit insurance. Simply put, we are more competitive because of this resource.

I'd also like to talk about the assistance we've received from the U.S. Commercial Service. For years I have relied on the New Orleans US Export Assistance Center for market research, trade leads, help with export documentation, and contacts in international markets. These trade leads are very specific and actionable opportunities generated by U.S. Commercial Service staff in US Embassies overseas. Timely information like that is a huge help in our marketing efforts.

On several occasions the Export Assistance Center has been instrumental in helping us close a sale. For example, recently a potential customer from El Salvador contacted the Export Assistance Center to verify that we were a reputable supplier. USEAC staff were able to immediately verify that they knew me personally and had even visited our company over the years. With that assurance we won the sale.

I'm also grateful to the US Department of Commerce for establishing the Louisiana District Export Council, or DEC. The DEC serves as something of an advisory board for the Commerce Department. Its membership includes exporters like me, trade association representatives, federal, state, and local export assistance specialists, and service providers like attorneys, bankers, and freight forwarders. I'm honored to be a member of the Louisiana DEC. Together our members have over 100 years of hands-on trade experience. We act as mentors to new exporters in our state, and work with the USEAC to develop outreach and other programs. This year we embarked on an inclusive planning process to identify five core objectives for our DEC; members volunteered to staff subcommittees to work on action items for each objective. One of these is a Louisiana Exporters' Resource Guide, about which we just met this morning.

My fellow DEC members also are wonderful resources for me personally. We share ideas, challenges and best practices; we get together quarterly to discuss new trade trends and other developments. It's nice to be part of an exporting community.

Finally, I should note what a big help the Central America Free Trade Agreement has been to our company. Free trade agreements like this one make our products more competitive. We see a direct result between CAFTA and

increased sales in Central America. I encourage the Congress to work toward the passage of other trade agreements, such as Colombia and Panama.

Before I close, I want to thank Senator Landrieu again for asking me to testify before this Committee. I gained my U.S. citizenship last November, and I am honored to be recognized for my company's success, and to represent American entrepreneurs everywhere. Thank you.