Introduction

Increasing globalization and multinational trade agreements have serious implications for agricultural and rural development throughout the United States and especially areas served by the NAFTA Corridor from Canada to Mexico. Recent legislative changes in Washington with the passage of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 ("Freedom to Farm" Act) means that producers who formerly shared financial risks with government will now assume those risks themselves. Adcock et al. (1998) reported current trends resulting from the Asian crisis highlight the importance of international trade on agricultural and rural communities. Long term sustainability and stimulation of economic growth which are major concerns of agricultural production entities, agribusiness and rural communities will now need to rely on their own comparative advantages in competing with their competitors in other areas of the world. Diversification of rural enterprises and production operations will become increasingly more important. However, agricultural processing and business ventures which have the ability to diversify income and stabilize economic returns will begin to emerge as the result of recent national and global policy changes.

Sanders et al. (1998) reported the potential for trade development along the I-35 NAFTA Corridor is of considerable magnitude. "To fully tap this potential, two key areas were considered important: what types of service and information do non-exporting firms need in order to become exporters and what service providers and services are currently
available to Oklahoma agricultural producers and agribusiness interests.” Who benefits? Overall, most commodity and farm groups seem to believe NAFTA has been a positive change for U. S. agriculture. But there is also serious dissent. According to AgXport News (1997) Oklahoma agricultural producers exported nearly a half billion dollars of agricultural products in 1996, which was an increase of $23 million or five percent over the previous year. Agricultural exports in Oklahoma support over 8,000 jobs. Oklahoma’s share of agricultural exports as a percentage of total gross receipts from agriculture was up from 10 percent to 13 percent over the three-year period from 1993 to 1996. Since NAFTA went into effect, Oklahoma Agricultural Exports increased 30 percent in 1997 alone. Wheat exports totaling $300 million led the way in 1996, while animal and animal products exceeded $79 million, followed by cotton and soybean exports at over $40 million, and peanuts and peanut products surpassed $17 million.

Great! However, this grand and noble achievement was not an isolated incident. It happened because appropriate infrastructure was in place to expedite the process and assure the reality of an exchange of commodities between the parties involved. Addressing the mechanism involved brings about the need to look at the support system which allows us as a nation to be a major world exporter of agricultural products and to provide an advantageous business opportunity for Oklahoma Agricultural producers and agribusiness interests. Introduction of a support system causes one to ask two questions in particular; 1) who is involved? And 2) what is their role? Number one; various agencies of government supported by tax dollars are involved which allows the infrastructure to work—thus providing opportunity for agricultural producers, agribusiness and the creation of jobs. To answer the question, “Who are the agencies of government which are able to effect change and
opportunity for those willing to risk resources to acquire further benefits? And what is their role?

Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived role of selected service providers in bringing international trade to rural Oklahoma.

Objectives:

1. To determine the perceived international marketing needs of rural Oklahoma.
2. To determine the types of services provided by selected service providers to rural enterprises.
3. To identify other agencies providing international marketing services to rural enterprises in Oklahoma.
4. To determine the perceived role of public universities in providing international marketing assistance.
5. To determine the perceived priorities among selected service providers for training, education, technical information, and international trade assistance.

Scope:

The scope of this study includes selected state and federal agencies with legislative mandates for providing international trade assistance to agricultural and rural enterprises in Oklahoma.
Methods of the Study:

Five Oklahoma public service providers were selected for this study. The service providers were: the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), United States Department of Commerce (USDOC), Oklahoma Department of Commerce (ODOC), Oklahoma Department of Agriculture (ODA), and Oklahoma State University (OSU).

This study utilized a multiple methods approach—quantitative as well as qualitative research methods—to gather and analyze the data. This design allowed for a more holistic approach to understanding the educational role of service providers in introducing concept(s) of International Trade among non-exporters within the framework of business and industry in rural Oklahoma as well as academia.

Development of the Instrument

An open-ended questionnaire ascertained information from selected service providing agencies about their role in educating and assisting clientele in making informed decisions concerning their involvement in international trade.

The researchers composed of rural development, policy, international trade specialists along with an agricultural educator and a graduate research assistant developed the instrument. The Assistant Dean for International Programs in Agriculture reviewed the instrument prior to its use. A pilot test was conducted with a former university coordinator for international programs to determine clarity organization, and sequencing of the questions. The ten questions addressed were: 1) Perceptions of international marketing needs of rural/non-metro businesses in Oklahoma; 2) What services do you offer to such businesses?; 3) Prioritize international marketing services you provide to such businesses,
from most used to least used; 4) Identify other agencies providing international marketing services to rural businesses; 5) What services do these agencies offer?; 6) What rural businesses has your agency served over the past two years?; 7) Do you perceive the role of public universities in offering international marketing assistance as important, somewhat important or not important?; 8) What international marketing needs of rural businesses are currently not being met?; 9a) Prioritized the usefulness of training/mentoring, food safety, education/internships, information/technical assistance, supply/demand, networking, and international extension/trade; 9b) Prioritize the importance of the above concerns; and 10) Other Comments.

Qualitative Procedures

In the qualitative tradition, the primary sources of information were the verbal responses of the five service provider coordinators interviewed; one each from SBDC, USDOC, ODOC, ODA, and OSU. Approval for the utilization of human subjects was provided prior to the beginning of the study.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews and observations. Data collection occurred at the selected service providers state offices in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Stillwater during December 1997 and January 1998.

A total of five key informants were individually interviewed using flexible interview protocol consisting of 10 open-ended questions directed by the study objectives. The interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length. Responses and notes were transcribed and summarized prior to leaving the observation site, with the interviewee given the
opportunity to observe the information and give their approval for reporting data in the aggregate.

Credibility of the Data

Qualitative research typically generates a large amount of information from a small number of individuals or cases which “increases the understanding of the situations or cases being studied but does not allow one to generalize back to the population” (Patton, p. 14). A major concern in qualitative research is the credibility of the data. Validity of the data in this study was determined through each researcher being responsible for purposeful sampling and a detailed audit of the information provided by the five service provider coordinators interviewed.

Analysis of the Data

After interviews were conducted and the information transcribed, data were grouped into domains and clusters, which was directed by the study objectives and interview questions. Qualitative data were primarily presented using an anecdotal scheme. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, individual rankings, ranges and means) were used when appropriate to assist in summarizing the data.

Results

The five agencies represented in this study involved the researchers’ contacts with the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), U. S. Department of Commerce (USDOC), Oklahoma Department of Commerce (ODOC), Oklahoma Department of Agriculture (ODA), and Oklahoma State University (OSU). The summary of results shown in Table 1 revealed the service providers were in unanimity in their belief that a need exists for
international trade and marketing education programs as well as assistance for rural businesses in Oklahoma.

Specifically, program needs varied from awareness to a variety of “how to” programs; including getting started, identifying markets, regulations, procedural concerns, and maintaining commitments as reliable trading partners in international markets. Respondents seemed to indicate priority concerns for awareness, export requirements, and sources of information.

According to the respondents, a wide range of services was provided to firms seeking to engage in international trade. Some of the services listed included: educational seminars, counseling, networking assistance, degree programs, research, and specific course work. Top priorities alluded to by non-university agencies seemed to indicate counseling as a priority followed by research. It was interesting to note provision of price quotes and acquisition of contracts for firms were not considered legitimate services in which public agencies should engage. On the other hand, OSU emphasized the provision of degree programs followed by extension education programs and counseling.

Other agencies identified by the study respondents as providing international marketing assistance to rural enterprises included Little Dixie Community Action Agency, Rural Enterprises, Inc., District Export Council, Foreign Agriculture Service, Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service, Tulsa World Trade Association, and Oklahoma City International Trade Association. Perceived services offered by the agencies identified by the respondents varied widely. The respondents further noted these other agencies tend to be market specific in focus, often involved in trade shows and more likely to serve larger firms.
Table 1. International Marketing Service Providers Survey for Intercom Project; Survey of Oklahoma providers conducted during the period December 1997-January 1998.

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<th>QUESTIONS</th>
<th>SBDC</th>
<th>USDOC</th>
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<th>OSU</th>
<th>SUMMARY</th>
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<td>* Perception of international marketing needs of rural/non-metro businesses in OK?</td>
<td>How-to, getting started</td>
<td>Need for and where to get export information</td>
<td>Need education on export requirements, product specs, documentation, marketing, opportunities, contacts, small operator limits, foreign business practices, cultural importances of commitment.</td>
<td>There is a need for students to receive an education in the area of international trade and related business, marketing, finance and economic areas. Also, there is a need for research and outreach activities supported by the University.</td>
<td>Needs vary from “how-to get started” to maintaining commitment to international markets.</td>
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<td>* What services do you offer to such businesses?</td>
<td>Statewide on request; “how to export” seminars on various topics</td>
<td>General export counseling, Industry-Specific export counseling, Country-Specific export counseling, market information, interna-tional trade contracts (computerized lists, trading partner programs, and trade promotion programs), Investment and feasibility studies, export licenses and controls.</td>
<td>Statewide; export counseling; agent and distributor searches; export workshops; establish contacts; attend meetings with clients.</td>
<td>All OK businesses w/ interest; Provide assistance in all phases except quoting prices &amp; contract agents.</td>
<td>Customized extension services for individual firms of groups, classes and formalized degree programs in many areas, research on international trade topics.</td>
<td>Wide range of services: educational seminars; counseling; network assistance; courses; degree programs; research. Specifically noted as services not provided were price quotes &amp; acting as contract agent.</td>
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<td>* Prioritize international marketing services you provide to such businesses, from most-used to least used.</td>
<td>1-individual counseling; 2-research; 3-seminars, workshops</td>
<td>The most used services are: 1 - Value-added export counseling, such as one on one assessment, market entry and market expansion. A big problem for firms is identifying markets. 2 - Finding market representation 3 - Contacts and trade leads 4 - Trade finance counseling service</td>
<td>1 - Export counseling for potential clientele; 2 - Agent/distributor searches; 3 - Customer match-ups; 4 - Workshops in rural communities.</td>
<td>Company size, product nature, market knowledge, &amp; experience affect user needs; not prioritized: strategic market plan development, procurement, transportation, documentation, labeling, health/sanitary requirements, coordination/consolidation of shipments, legal factors, custom regs, payment methods, credit guarantee, contact/ rep selection.</td>
<td>The most used services are classes taken by students preparing for a degree, extension programs to individuals, firms and organizations and research projects directed at specific problems.</td>
<td>Non-university services rank counseling as number 1; agent/other research as number 2. OSU primary activity is degree program, followed by extension programs including counseling.</td>
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<td>* What rural businesses has your agency served over the past 2 years?</td>
<td>New sports bra; lawnmower component; medical equipment</td>
<td>Only provides service to manufacturers. It does not matter to them whether or not the manufacturer is located in a rural or an urban area.</td>
<td>Industrial machinery/ equipment, oil and gas equipment, pump manufacturing; food processing</td>
<td>International assistance to exporters of cattle, wheat, cotton, meat, hay, peanuts, pecans, &amp; food processing</td>
<td>Agricultural producers, rural businesses, agribusinsses. The University has a wide range of stakeholders.</td>
<td>Sports bra, lawnmower component, medical equipment, manufacturers, industrial machinery/ equipment, oil/gas equipment, food processing, cattle, wheat, cotton, meat, hay, peanuts, pecans</td>
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<td>* Do you perceive the role of public universities in offering international marketing assistance as important, somewhat important, or not important?</td>
<td>Important to somewhat important</td>
<td>The Universities should focus on the provision of basic educational services. The best services a University could provide for trade development is the provision of qualified, knowledgeable graduates that firms in the Oklahoma area could hire to work in international trade development</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>International marketing assistance thru education &amp; info.</td>
<td>Comprehensive Universities like Oklahoma State University strive to play an important role in societal development in the regions they serve. The missions of teaching, research and extension should include a readily visible international</td>
<td>Important in providing education/info related to international marketing.</td>
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Rural enterprises served in the past two years by the service providers revealed a diverse range of firms as reported by study respondents. An example of the firms involved in exporting included a manufacture of sports bras, lawn mower components, industrial machinery, fabrication of oil and gas equipment, and design and manufacture of medical equipment. Respondents also reported the export of a broad range of agriculture-related equipment for food processing, production, management, harvesting and processing of agricultural products.

The perceived role of public universities in providing international market assistance ranged from “important” to “somewhat important” as indicated by the study respondents. Specifically, one respondent expressed, “Universities should focus on the provision of educational services” and “The best services a university could provide would be to produce qualified and knowledgeable graduates for Oklahoma firms to hire.”

Needs not being served as perceived by responding service provider representatives included dissemination and delivery of information, little activity involving local

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Notes: SBDC: Small Business Development Center; USDOC: US Department of Commerce; ODOC: Oklahoma Department of Commerce; ODA: Oklahoma Department of Agriculture; OSU: Oklahoma State University
contributions in providing trade and marketing information, limited access to the trade data library information and development of trade associations.

Priority issues concerning usefulness and importance seemed to be rather closely ranked. Service provider representatives ranking selected issues indicated information and technical assistance were top priorities, followed by providing training and mentoring, then supply and demand networking. Education and internships seemed to be equal in priority with extension programming in addressing international trade concerns. Summary comments by service provider representatives were varied. One service provider recognized OSU and specific departments within the Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources as being “helpful and willing to partner with them;” and, “provision of ongoing assistance from the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)” and the Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA) as being important. Another respondent representative emphasized the importance of “Introducing concepts involving international trade at the elementary school level if we are going to bring about real change;” or “continuing agriculture student exchanges;” or “extend mentoring roles into rural Oklahoma.” Willingness to provide service and assistance was unequivocally expressed in the education arena—“The university is ready to expand its international role.”

Conclusions

There is the presence of an effective group of service providers in Oklahoma. The perceived needs are in line with many of the services currently being provided by the agencies represented in this study. Success of the existing service providers was evident. It was apparent the missing links in this study were: 1) expansion of awareness programs, 2) coordinating efforts within and among service providers to facilitate the education process,
and 3) ability to effectively assist firms in rural areas. In the future, as economies develop, an expanded and coordinated trade development effort by the land-grant university partnering with the service providers through a center concept would likely result in net benefits to the citizens of Oklahoma.

Educational Importance of the Study

Considering the current agricultural economy, what could be more apropos than being able to make additional information available to producers, who could use it in making decisions about spreading their risks. The opportunity exists for producers and rural enterprises alike to diversify their operations to create additional jobs and income. In fact, several opportunities exist. Cooperative Extension has the unique opportunity to work with both agricultural producers and rural communities in providing educational programming concerning international trade. In addition, this particular issue affords Cooperative Extension the opportunity to partner with service providers in making information available as well as conducting “How to” and “Getting Started” workshops.

Agricultural Educators are in an enviable position to provide leadership in International Agricultural Education. The FFA’s Work Experience Abroad Program (WEA) provides unequaled opportunity for young people seeking to prepare themselves for the 21st century. The opportunity to participate in agricultural work experience in another country gives one the opportunity to develop an understanding of production and marketing practices in a different culture. As a result, students begin to understand the importance of agriculture from a different perspective and why agricultural policy is distinctive from country to country. WEA also affords college students the opportunity to work through the Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) in joining an Agricultural Attaché at specific U. S. Embassy
locations regarding the U. S. Trade Mission in that country. Just think of the number of
internships available alone for which young men and women could prepare themselves for
the future.

Opportunity is the bottom line concerning the role of service providers in addressing
the needs of rural communities. The primary role is education, providing information,
mentoring and networking. Many service providers are already involved in helping clientele
identify opportunities and feeling their way through the process of how to get started. The
service providers seem to be willing and eager to expand their commitment in providing
assistance to agriculture and community enterprises in developing the potential for
International Trade in rural Oklahoma.

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City, UT.
THE PERCEIVED ROLE OF SELECTED SERVICE PROVIDERS IN BRINGING INTERNATIONAL TRADE TO RURAL OKLAHOMA
M.K. Williams, J.D. White, D.M. Henneberry, J.E. Osborn, L.D. Sanders, and M.D. Woods
Oklahoma State University

Discussant: James E. Christiansen, Texas A&M University

Contribution and Significance of Research

The research reported provides insights, as perceived by the five key informants interviewed from each of the five service providers, into the roles of the institutions that they represent in opening international trade to rural Oklahoma. While timely and valuable, it is hoped that this study could be replicated to include more informants from each of the service providers so that a check could be made on the consistency of the responses as they apply to each of the service providers.

What is truly significant about the research is the second conclusion drawn by the researchers, namely that information about “…coordinating efforts within and among service providers to facilitate the education(al) process” is a missing link that needs to be examined. Carried further, the points made under “Educational Importance of the Study” underscore the significance of exploring further different ways in which the service providers in Oklahoma can cooperate and coordinate efforts to educate and to help the intended beneficiaries.

While done in Oklahoma, the same type of study needs to be conducted in other mid-continent states, such Texas and Kansas, that are in the I-35 NAFTA corridor.

Procedural Considerations

Would it have been helpful to have separated the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service from Oklahoma State University when examining the perceived role of the University in order to have key informants from both entities? Also, if the study were to be replicated, would it have been helpful to ask each of the service providers about ways in which they could cooperate on or coordinate activities, especially educational activities, between and among other service providers?

Questions for Consideration

The conclusion was drawn that “There is the presence of an effective group of service providers in Oklahoma.” It should be cautioned that this caution is based on the perceptions of the representatives of those service providers. Because of this, the question is raised: “What are the reactions of targeted beneficiaries of these service providers to the role, type, and effectiveness of efforts of these service providers to help people in rural Oklahoma?

Could the findings of this study, such as those presented in Table 1, be used by a curriculum center in Oklahoma to develop an introductory resource unit for agricultural science students in Oklahoma on internationally related services provided by the different agencies?