

GLOBAL AGRIBUSINESS CENTER QUESTIONNAIRE COMING YOUR WAY

Members should be on the lookout for an electronic questionnaire that will give credibility to the development of a Global Agribusiness Center (GAC).

Shailey Innes, trade advocacy and marketing director for the Kansas World Trade Center, Inc., has been working with a task force to create the GAC, thanks to her company and a partnership between the Agri-Business Council of Wichita (ABCW). Once developed, Innes says the GAC could serve as a trade and international market resource for Kansas entrepreneurs, agriculture producers and companies.

“The Global Agribusiness Center is meant to serve as a clearinghouse of international opportunities and resources for the agri-business community,” she says.

For more than a year, a task force comprised of bankers, government representatives, ABCW members, university staff and marketing professionals held conversations and ultimately developed a work plan for the GAC. Now, Innes says it is time to develop the plan on an individual basis.

“Some of the main objectives of the center were to better understand the needs of our community, disperse information about overseas opportunities and to provide education and training,” she says. “For example, the trade regulations for an aviation company might not be the same as what is applied to agribusiness.”

Last year the Kansas World Trade Center (KWTC) requested federal funding to begin the Global Agribusiness Center and received an earmark grant of \$214,225 for the project. Innes says the money has supported task force meetings and will now help uncover exactly what agribusiness companies need to effectively market products globally. For now, the GAC has a virtual presence on the KWTC Web site, kansaswtc.org.

The online questionnaire will be ready by April and a link will be E-mailed to all ABCW members. Innes encourages recipients to take ten minutes to fill out the survey and pass the link along to others in the agribusiness industry. Questions will be based on what is currently being done to expand agriculture trade relationships and what additional resources and assistance is needed.

“We want to keep it short and to the point while still gaining valuable information,” Innes says. “Again, our goal is to evaluate the needs of agribusiness and reaffirm what the task force believes is already needed.” —

MEMBER PROFILE: DENNIS BLICK, COBANK

Agriculture businesses may have a financial friend in CoBank. With 150-active customers, many of whom have been with the bank for 75 years, CoBank's Wichita branch offers products and services to businesses in Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado.



Blick

CoBank is a sister organization to Farm Credit and of the roughly \$215 billion offered by Farm Credit system each year, \$60 billion is committed to CoBank customers. It is CoBank's mission to support rural communities. Therefore it does not lend money directly to individuals but rather to agribusiness like coops as well as rural community services including telephone and water systems.

Dennis Blick, Region Manager for CoBank's Wichita Banking Center, says the bank's long-term relationship CoBank with so many of its customers is unique. The customer who was granted the very first loan from the Wichita office in 1933 is active with the bank even today.

“We view ourselves as an extension of their business,” Blick says. “When an agribusiness needs financing we hope the first call they make is to CoBank.”

CoBank provides long-term funding for fixed assets like grain elevators as well as equipment and vehicles but the greater value is providing for the day-to-day activities of these capital intensive businesses. Blick gives the example of a local coop's annual need to purchase millions of bushels of grain from farmers. CoBank provides a revolving line of credit that allows a coop to purchase grain, pay for its marketing and buy fertilizer, chemical and fuel.

“It is a constant cycle of borrowing and repayment that revolves all the time,” he says. “The relationship is different in that we are not financing the concrete elevator nor when the loan is paid off that we end the relationship. Rather we fund day-to-day activities with farmer members.”

Like its partners in the Farm Credit system, CoBank distributes earnings back to customers – in effect reducing the cost

AGCO ANNOUNCES NEW STRATEGY: FEWER BRANDS

AGCO Corp., a worldwide manufacturer and distributor of agricultural equipment, announced details of the company's North American brand strategy for 2010 and beyond. Robert Crain, senior vice president and general manager, says focusing on fewer brands will bring more innovation and technology to customers in key areas, achieve greater brand impact and help full-line dealers better support their valued customers. In this regard, Challenger and Massey Ferguson will become the foundation brands within North America.

Hesston, Sunflower, Gleaner, White Planters, SpraCoupe and Fendt will be leveraged via co-branding strategies and the Gleaner brand, however, will be enhanced. The plan will phase out the AGCO brand of equipment, including its line of orange tractors, which are expected to be marketed into 2011.

AGCO was founded in 1990 and offers a full product line of tractors, combines, hay tools, sprayers, forage, tillage equipment, implements and related replacement parts. —

BUSINESS PROFILE: ARMSTRONG|SHANK

There's no doubt Susan Armstrong believes in the power and promise of agriculture. One might even say as president and CEO of public relations, marketing and advertising firm Armstrong|Shank, her belief and understanding of the ag industry is critical to its success.

Farmers, ranchers and industry's business owners realize the complexity of their occupations. Day in and day out there are ugly mathematical equations, greasy engineering projects and the most challenging macroeconomic questions possible on the farm. Making sure the state's largest city appreciates these facts is a constant struggle. Agribusiness leaders should sleep better at night knowing there is a public relations firm that “gets it.”



Armstrong

“Sometimes, people take agricultural products for granted and often underestimate how challenging it is to be successful in farming and ranching operations,” Armstrong says.

“Today's growers, along with manufacturers who produce, package and distribute ag-based products, are leading the way in stewardship of resources and are innovators in new products to enhance our lifestyle and improve efficiencies.”

Armstrong began the agency in 1981 after ten years of working in the public relations and advertising industry. With offices in south Wichita along Cowskin Creek, Armstrong thanks the Internet and fast-paced technology for allowing her staff of 15 to be seconds away from their clients, no matter where each of them are located. She describes the company as a place where employees can be creative and concentrate on doing great work.

“You can work very hard on ads that sell products and drive customers through the door,” she says. “While I enjoy that part of advertising, it's even more rewarding to develop solid marketing strategies and creative solutions when there is a complex message to convey. So, I wanted to find clients who are making a difference in our quality of life – and help them with their marketing.”

The firm's agribusiness clients include Mt. Plains Farm Credit Services, Farm Credit Services of Southern Colorado, Meat=Link Management and Imperial Wagyu Beef. Over the years, they have also assisted the Kansas Wheat Commission and Gardiner Angus Ranch. The Agri-Business Council of Wichita also called on Armstrong|Shank to help name and promote its 2007 BioNXT conference, which resulted in a successful, well-attended event.

Currently, Armstrong is also helping ABCW and the Kansas World Trade Center develop and promote a Global Agri-Business Center. The center will be a resource for statewide agribusinesses, as well as other countries who want more information on how to do business with Kansas.

“I'm really excited about what we should be able to accomplish with this new program,” she says. “More and more of what we do is global, in scope. This project will help tell the story of Kansas agriculture to an international audience.”

In addition to a membership with the ABCW, Armstrong is also a member of the National Agri-Marketing Association. —

of borrowing by 1 percent. Of this amount, 65% is paid in cash with the other 35% retained.

“That's how the bank is capitalized and is structured as a coop for that very reason,” Blick says. “When cooperatives were new in the 1930s the banking industry generally didn't know how to lend to a coop because they are a farmer-owned organization. It's a different way of banking but it's our specialty.”

Blick himself has been with the Farm Credit system for 35 years, just after obtaining his bachelor of science in business administration from Wichita State University. He started as a field examiner with the former Federal Intermediate Credit Bank, currently named U.S. Ag Bank.

Growing up on a farm in Barber County, Blick says this career is an opportunity to stay connected with people in agriculture – an ideal situation for a farm boy at heart.

“Cobank has a specific mission to serve rural agricultural endeavors,” he says. “For many rural communities the farm coop is the largest single business in town and it's vital to agriculture at its basic level.” —

