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**PROCEEDINGS OF A SYMPOSIUM**

**ON**

**THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE  
IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS  
PROGRAMS**



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INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN AGRICULTURAL  
ECONOMICS PROGRAMS

Leo C. Polopolus<sup>1</sup>

The world in terms of time and space is rapidly shrinking, bringing nations increasingly in closer contact. Advances in communications and transportation technologies continue to increase the speed and efficiency of international information exchange and the world wide movement of people and products. These and other advancements have brought about the increased international exchange of goods and services and expanding competition in the world's marketplaces. Moreover, with the emergence of new economic powers in the world and the nation's growing trade deficit, the American public has belatedly begun to awaken to the realities of impending threats to our economic progress, standard of living, national security and prestige.

As an aside on the trade balance situation, particularly the export side of agricultural trade balances, the year 1981 represented the historic peak in American agricultural exports. Since 1981, United States agricultural exports have sagged. What we may fail to realize is that the drop in exports has been precipitous for raw agricultural commodities. On the other hand, there has actually been a small increase in the export of value-added agricultural products in recent years.

The Land Grant University and Experiment Station System has moved with its traditional "glacial speed" in adjusting its research, teaching and extension programs to the emergence of the new global economy. Recently, thanks to the vision and leadership of a few researchers and administrators, regional research projects dealing with international trade in agricultural products have been funded in the North Central and Southern Regions. Two more regional research proposals in this area are being developed in the Western Region. The major response to the threats of global competition has come from the United States Congress, however. Over the past two years, Congress has approved and funded 10 International Trade Development Centers and is considering 20 new proposals submitted by the Land Grant Universities. The federal support for these Centers came by a circuitous route essentially by-passing the CSRS/Experiment Station federal budgetary process. The Congress has targeted specific institutions to receive federal funding to establish International Trade Development Centers to "enhance the exportation of agricultural and related products". This accelerated pace in activities and financial support

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represents the beginnings of the internationalization of Land Grant Experiment System programs and is a pivotal period in the history of the System.

The purpose of this symposium is to describe and document these important developments for the historical record and to gain the vision and perspectives of academic and industry leaders on the directions the System should take in the future to enhance the exportation of United States agricultural and related products and to meet the growing challenges of the global economy.