

Big Picture Report: July 2019

Bernadette Wiltz, SUSTA

In collaboration with World Perspectives, Inc.

It's hard to believe that the first half of 2019 is already in the books; looking back, the past six months have been a very productive time for SUSTA. I thought this mid-year mark would be a good time to share an update.

First, we wrapped up the final evaluations from our 2018 program year. Thank you to all the companies who gave us the critical feedback from your marketing activities last year. As I wrote in these pages last month, the responses and data we receive from you are absolutely vital to effectively managing the Global Events and 50% CostShare efforts under the USDA's Market Access Program (MAP).

While 2018 presented some major challenges on the global trade front, I'm happy to report it was nonetheless a year of significant growth: 1,090 Southern companies participated in SUSTA activities, an increase of 14 percent compared to the previous year; 115 companies booked first-time export sales, an incredible 203 percent growth over 2017; and companies in the 50% CostShare program created 51 new jobs as a result of their export success.

SUSTA-supported export sales reached \$292.5 million. I'm also happy to report that Southern companies participating in SUSTA's programs saw an average return of \$65 for each dollar invested. Better yet, companies are projecting to top \$500 million in sales this year.

So far, we've seen some great preliminary results for 2019. Strong results have been reported from the Fruit Logistica show in Europe, the Canada Inbound Trade Mission for Wine, Beer and Spirits, and the Gulfood trade show in Dubai, for example.

Also, as you know, USDA has allocated additional funds starting this year to support further export market development under a new program, Agricultural Trade Promotion (ATP). As part of these efforts, we're looking forward to some expanded events and redoubling efforts in certain regions, including outbound trade missions to Central America and Scandinavia coming up in September. The ATP program operates similarly to MAP, but there are few key eligibility differences; for example, the limits on company size and mandatory graduation out of a market after five years have been waived. Check out our website to learn more about ATP.

This year SUSTA also implemented new efforts to improve outreach and export education activities to better serve SUSTA companies and expand the reach of our export programs to new companies. In the unlikely event that you haven't heard from us already, you will be soon. I hope you can take advantage of our export readiness seminars and educational webinars that will provide in-market insights on key export destinations.

Last month, SUSTA's Board of Directors – comprised all the Commissioners and Secretaries of the Southern States Departments of Agriculture – met to review SUSTA's progress, detail the key priorities for the various States, and develop SUSTA's 2020 export strategy plan.

Finally, by the time you read this, members of our SUSTA team will be in Washington, D.C., at the annual U.S. Agriculture Export Development Council meeting. We will be meeting with seasoned industry veterans and top U.S. trade officials, including the agricultural attaches from U.S. embassies around the world, to hear first-hand about the opportunities for Southern U.S. food and agricultural products.

In short, we have built up a lot of momentum so far through 2019. All of us here at SUSTA look forward to working with you to keep it going!