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County Plays Role in Global Market

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SYCAMORE- A focus on exports in Illinois has allowed it to lead other Midwestern states and is among the top state in economies in the nation when it comes to global trade.

DeKalb County has taken part in that trend and will continue to play a role in Illinois' position in the global market, according to information presented at a business roundtable Tuesday hosted by the DeKalb County Economic Development Corp.

In February 2009, the Northern Illinois University Center for Governmental Studies did an analysis of globalization in Illinois.

Bob Gleeson, who directs the center, said that Illinois made a shift over the past 15 years so that the majority of growth has been coming from more trade to customers outside the United States.

Illinois trades about \$48.7 billion in goods and \$16.5 billion in services per year, Gleeson said. Traded services, for example would include an architect in Chicago designing a skyscraper in Shanghai.

Gleeson called this growth "a sign of renewed global competitiveness" and one that creates higher paying jobs for Illinois workers.

It's also not limited to the Chicago metro area, Gleeson said. With NIU and access to Rockford and Chicago's metro areas, he called the position DeKalb County is in "the heartland of the heartland."

Larry Mix, who works out of Monsanto Corp.s' Waterman facility, noted how perhaps one of the biggest local contributions Monsanto has offered to the global market is the winged ear logo developed by the company's predecessor DeKalb Ag.

Mix called this "one of the most widely recognized agricultural brands in the world."

With 20,000 employees at about 500 locations around the world, about one-third of all sales revenues are generated outside of North America, Mix said.

"We have many locations because we believe that to deliver on the needs of local customers... you have to be locally based," Mix said. "You have to be in those environments where the products are grown."

Joanne Devick, market director for Driv-Lok, said that the Sycamore-based manufacturing company exports to about two dozen countries, but how products get there varies.

Devick said about 10 percent of sales are those purchased by a U.S. company and shipped overseas for cheaper assembly work. A smaller amount, about 2 percent, are purchases by international companies.

However, it's hard to determine where a product goes when there is a freight forwarder involved or when the buyer is a domestic subsidiary of a foreign company, Devick said.

Global sales typically are successful when the start point and end point have solid relationships, Gleeson said. This includes having the mayors of the two cities meet, for instance or having universities of the two regions collaborate on ideas or research.

Devick echoed that these long-distance relationships can take time and resources to build, but are important.

"It's a very slow-moving relationship," Devick said. "It can take years to cultivate."