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S.C. exports

■ OUR OPINION ■

Orangeburg would be key player in major commerce

Export numbers point to relevance of inland port

An inland port in Orangeburg County is most often envisioned as center for bringing imports from the Port of Charleston by rail to the point at which they can be distributed in multiple directions via truck.

Not to be missed in the equation is a port's role as an exporter. The same rail link that connects the Charleston port with an inland port is designed to transport goods from the inland site, where they arrive by truck and rail, to ships in Charleston.

A report this past week by the South Carolina Department of Commerce and the State Ports Authority reveals just how significant the export business is for the Palmetto State.

Exports in 2008 totaled more than \$19.8 billion in goods sold to 193 countries, representing a 19.65 percent increase over 2007 totals. In 2008, South Carolina's 19.65 percent export growth ranked it 18th among the 54 states and U.S. territories and number three in the Southeast.

The state's top 10 export industries last year were vehicles, machinery, rubber, plastics, electrical machinery, paper and paperboard, organic chemicals, optics and medical equipment, iron and steel, and wood pulp.

Of the top 20 product sectors, the sector that experienced the greatest export growth in 2008 was aircraft and spacecraft, which rose 153 percent totaling more than \$143 million. The increase was followed closely by the iron and steel sector, which rose 132 percent totaling more than \$380 million.

Other growing export product sectors included inorganic chemicals, up 69 percent over 2007; miscellaneous chemical products, up 42 percent; machinery, up 34 percent, and photographic equipment and paper, up 32 percent.

Posting a 27 percent increase from 2007, Germany remained ahead of Canada as South Carolina's number one export market in 2008, purchasing more than \$4.78 billion in products. Germany's top purchases included vehicles, machinery, electrical machinery, paper and paperboard, optics and medical equipment and electrical machinery. Rounding out the top 10 export markets in 2008 in order of rank were Canada at number two, Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, France, Australia, Belgium, Japan and Brazil.

Of the top 20 countries, three of South Carolina's most impressive growth markets in 2008 were Saudi Arabia, up 405 percent and moving up three slots to 12; Taiwan, up 173 percent and moving up 29 places to 15, and the United Arab Emirates, up 88 percent and keeping the number 11 spot. Automobiles, machinery, electrical machinery, paper and plastics exports played large roles in these increases.

The numbers are good news in a time when positive economic news is hard to come by. The signs for the future are good. And for Orangeburg County, becoming a key exporting player via an inland port is particularly relevant.

The time is now to be certain the house is in order for the better times ahead, particularly with regard to issues that lawmakers have with the Ports Authority. The state has too much at stake as the Southeast becomes an increasingly important import-export point to allow a governance dispute to derail progress.