

Colleges sign agribusiness partnerships

BY SUSAN STABLEY

Two Miami educational institutes have inked deals with major food agencies to help smaller businesses in Latin America navigate U.S. food safety legislation and bioterrorism concerns.

Florida International University will work with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture focusing on agribusiness in Latin America.

The agreement, signed Oct. 14, is the first between IICA and any university. IICA was established in 1942 by the Pan-American Union, predecessor to the Organization of American States.

The partnership pools IICA agricultural know-how and in-country personnel with the university's College of Business Administration and Latin American and Caribbean Center to help small and medium-size businesses in developing nations.

FIU wants to help the exporters penetrate markets throughout the hemisphere, said Jerry Haar, senior fellow at FIU's Global Entrepreneurship Center.

"This is knowledge management, which is clearly a business tool," said Haar, also a professor of management and international business.

On Oct. 13, the Miami-based Food Safety Institute of the Americas officially debuted, inking deals with Miami Dade College and the University of Florida. The institute falls under the U.S. Department of Agriculture and focuses on raw foods and meats.

A survey in 2003 by Fort Lauderdale law firm Becker & Poliakoff found that more than half of food industry executives were unaware of the 2002 Bioterrorism Act, which requires prior notice of all food shipments entering the country.

The region needs a way to test locally the foods entering the United States, said attorney Peter Quinter, partner in charge of the customs and international trade department at Becker & Poliakoff.

For now, he said, samples are sent to Atlanta, which can cause a two- to four-day delay in testing.

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