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MISSOURI EXPORTS HIT RECORD MARK; STATE WANTS MORE NEXT YEAR (Published April 2005 in the Jefferson City Business Times) - 3/25/2005

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COLUMBIA, Mo. – With 2004 Missouri exports growing a record 24 percent, \$1.763 billion, Missouri exporters are doing their part to counteract the soaring U.S. trade deficit, and the Missouri Department of Economic Development has hopes for another record next year.

“Over the last few decades, the state has taken a really active role in helping businesses market their goods overseas, and I think this is a result of that,” said Paul Sloca, communications director for the Missouri Department of Economic Development. “Governor Blunt is committed to not only setting a record this year, but hopefully with some of his policies, and the department’s policies, to set another record next year.”

According to data released by the state Department of Economic Development, only six other states had larger growth in exports: Montana, Nevada, Idaho, West Virginia Tennessee and Vermont. Missouri’s export growth totaled \$8.997 billion, compared to \$7.234 billion in 2003, fueled by high growth rates in minerals and ores, agricultural products, textiles and fabrics, transportation equipment and chemicals.

Last week, representatives of the Mexican port city of Lazaro Cardenas pledged to work with Kansas City officials to work together to increase Asian imports and bypass shipping bottlenecks in Los Angeles and Long Beach, Calif. Cargo containers would be unloaded on the Mexican coast and transported by rail to Kansas City, where they would be processed for the United States market.

Japan, China and the United Kingdom are big Missouri trading partners, but Canada and Mexico make up more than half the Missouri export increase, so the rise in export growth would appear to reflect rising NAFTA trade.

“The essential growth in these exports really shows that Missouri is able to compete in the global economy,” Sloca said. “If you see other countries coming in to Missouri, doing business and obviously being satisfied with Missouri products, then certainly other countries will be looking at Missouri as a great source of products.”

Missouri plays an important role in NAFTA trade. In recent years, Kansas City has become an inland port for NAFTA goods, complete with an International Freight Gateway at the former

Richards-Gebaur Air Force Base. Interstates 35 and 29 travel link in Kansas City and form the foundation of a truck pipeline that runs from Mexico City to Winnipeg, Canada.

Likewise, I-35 ends at Duluth, Minn., an important port for trade with Canada, and a proposed upgrade of U.S. Highway 71 to become Interstate 49 would provide a direct link to New Orleans, another important NAFTA port. On the other side of the state, Interstate 55, which runs through St. Louis, is an important conduit for moving NAFTA goods between New Orleans and Chicago.

State transportation officials along the I-35 corridor have launched a \$1.5 million feasibility study to determine infrastructure and costs associated with upgrading I-35 to meet the increasing demand for NAFTA truck traffic. Upgrades to I-35 are estimated to cost \$3.4 billion over the next five years, according to the North American Superhighway Coalition.

