

Success Story

Helping Feed the World

One Export at a Time

Zeigler Brothers



Chris Stock with customers in Vietnam

The Company

Zeigler Brothers began in 1935 by selling livestock feed to farmers near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Brothers Ty and Leroy ran the business until Leroy's son, Tom, took over and changed direction to focus on research and development of specialty animal foods and aquatic diets. Today, the company has two manufacturing facilities in Pennsylvania and two in Mexico, supplies 300 different products, and sells to 50 countries. Zeigler Brothers is a 2013 recipient of the President's "E" Award for Exports. Chris Stock is the international sales manager.

The Challenge

Most of the challenges faced by the company are in the form of helping customers deal with localized issues such as diseases that affect the fish species being farmed. Other concerns include how to find and perform due diligence of prospective customers and to make sure we understand the environmental regulations in the countries in which it does business.

Zeigler had a fire about 6 years ago that devastated one of its production facilities.

According to Stock, "The fire actually helped us to become more efficient, to make the most of what we have, and to modernize some things as well. We made the most out of what was a terrible situation and really didn't skip a beat. Our customers are very loyal. And they helped see us through. And it's amazing how far the company has come since that fire not so long ago."

The Solution

Zeigler needed to grow, and to do that, it opted to expand its exports, which grew rapidly during the past 5 years and now represent a bit more than 50 percent of total sales. Zeigler now exports to 40–50 different countries every year. Zeigler focuses on markets that could be classified as having more risks than others, such as Nigeria and Ghana in West Africa, and Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia in Southeast Asia. India and China are also included. Said Stock, "Africa is on the cusp, I think. A lot of people see the opportunity, so it's a great time to get in early, because it's a huge emerging middle class that's developing there with spending power. They need things more than any other part of the world. They

have a lack of access to some of the higher-tech products and things that the United States can offer.”

Another solution for Zeigler is the U.S. Commercial Service, which Stock calls “a reliable go-to kind of hub.”

“In general, we come to them when we have export regulatory issues and we need somebody inside the government to guide us. A big thing about exporting is knowing that you don’t know it all and you’re always going to need support. The government has helped bring us into new markets. We went on a trade mission to Ghana when we were getting our Africa business warmed up and met people there that are clients now and important partners.”

Lessons Learned

Stock believes the company is better as a result of its exporting efforts. “It challenges us. We are able to take opportunities and things we learn in one country and apply them elsewhere. So we’re always learning and one of the great parts about our job is we’re connecting people throughout the world and bringing ideas from one place to the other, whether or not they directly impact our product. We’re a facilitator and our customers see that. And I think it’s a very strong point when they get to know us is that we’re connected throughout the world and bringing solutions from one corner to the next.”

One concrete example is making our products easier to use. Stock said: “In Southeast Asia, we were struggling with language barriers. We’ve been very ingrained in Latin America, very comfortable working with bilingual Spanish products and clients. But as we enter the Southeast Asian market we encounter the diversity of languages. Also because we’re in agriculture, one of the end-users of our products may have limited education or ability to read—so our products can be technical in nature, and how do we overcome these hurdles? And so we’ve begun developing and incorporating visual aids, videos, icons, logos, things that will help them understand how to use the product, what it’s designated for. And we’re able to take that and apply it elsewhere, because it is a universal need, but it’s being driven by a specific market area force at the moment.”

Perhaps the biggest lesson is that exporting is a “no-brainer.” Stock said: “You should be exporting. If you’re not, start learning about it, talk to other exporters and just go for it. I think the key things to exporting are persistence and patience. You have to realize that when you get in this, it may not be immediate sales, it may take years, but you have to have the long-term vision. If you’re willing to go through a couple of ups and downs, it can pay off in dividends. If you don’t enter the export market, you’re limiting your sales in a big way, no doubt about it.”



Chris Stock with customers in Armenia