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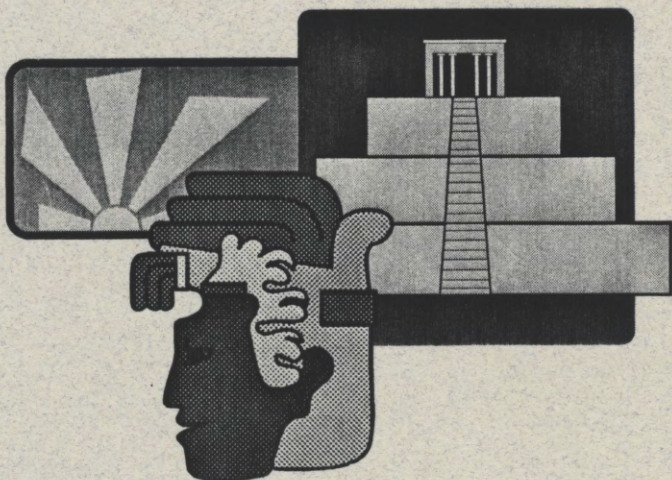
# Agricultural Commodity Promotion Policies and Programs in the Global Agri-Food System

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**Part Four**

***Firms' Awareness of USDA Export Assistance  
Programs***

# **Government Export Assistance: A Review and Secondary Analysis**

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## **Introduction**

In support of the U.S. policy objective of expanding U.S. exports, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and other U.S. government agencies, notably the Department of Commerce, have developed many programs which are intended to promote U.S. exports. Some of the programs administered by the USDA have received much attention from the public and researchers. The Export Enhancement Program (EEP), an export subsidy program, has been the subject of numerous studies which evaluated its effectiveness in expanding U.S. agricultural exports (Bailey and Houck, 1990; Seitzinger and Paarlberg, 1990; and Haley, 1988). The EEP's effectiveness in reaching its political objective of encouraging serious negotiations on the use of export subsidies during the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade has also been widely discussed (Paarlberg, 1995). More recently, the effectiveness of the Marketing Promotions Program (MPP) and similar programs, which authorize and support foreign market promotion activities, has been the subject of several studies (Nichols, Kinnucan, and Ackerman, 1991). While most studies have shown that the net marginal return from MPP activities is positive, the program has been widely criticized in public debates (Wiesendanger, 1992). Although the EEP and the MPP have received great attention, they are but a part of all the export promotion programs administered by the USDA.

The USDA, like the Department of Commerce and other agencies, also offers assistance in the form of export counseling, market information, export

credit guarantees, and technical advice. Table 1 describes these USDA services and identifies other federal agencies offering similar services. These services might best be described as facilitative export marketing services. They these firms with market intelligence and some risk bearing services. While some of these USDA services have been provided for as much as 40 years, they have generally escaped careful scrutiny. There is, however, a body of literature which has examined the general effectiveness of government export promotion services. Yet, these studies tended to focus on the services offered by the Department of Commerce (DOC) and overlook the services offered by the USDA.

The apparent duplication of service providers suggested by Table 1 is due to the traditional areas of responsibility defined by product type for these U.S. executive branch agencies. The USDA has primary responsibility for food and agricultural products, whereas the DOC is responsible for other manufactured goods and services. While some may question the efficiency of having different agencies supplying similar services to different and sometimes overlapping clients, this is not the purpose of this paper.

This paper reviews the studies which have examined the effectiveness of government sponsored facilitative export marketing services. It then focuses on a small number of studies which did include food processing firms in their analysis. Some additional analysis is performed on the results of one of these studies to determine what inferences can be drawn on the effectiveness of services offered by the USDA. This analysis should be useful to policy makers and administrators, who make decisions on allocating resources across these and other government programs. The paper also makes suggestions on additional research needed on the effectiveness of USDA facilitative export marketing services.

### **Literature Review**

The studies which have examined the effectiveness of government export promotion services are largely found in the international business literature. This

body of literature, which is still relatively scant, grew from early studies which sought to determine the primary obstacles firms faced in entering export markets (see Bilkey, 1978; Bilkey and Tesar, 1977; among others). These studies, conducted using surveys of firms, concluded that a lack of foreign market information and a poor understanding of export procedures were the major obstacles deterring firms from entering export markets. More recently, a limited number of studies on agribusiness firms have come to a similar conclusion (Hollon, 1989; Ruppel, 1989; Byford and Henneberry, 1996).

In an effort to overcome this apparent information barrier, many federal and state agencies established and maintained institutions and programs to aid firms in entering foreign markets. Subsequently, a number of studies were conducted to assess how effective these programs were in inducing firms to enter export markets and in expanding their export activities. Tesar (1974), in an analysis of Wisconsin firms and Tesar and Tarleton (1982) in a study of Virginia firms, concluded that the U.S. Department of Commerce and state export promotion efforts had little impact in encouraging firms to enter export markets. Weidersheim-Paul, Olson, and Welch (1978) in a study of Swedish firms concluded that similar Swedish government programs had little impact in encouraging export market entry. Denis and Depelteau (1985) in an analysis of Canadian firms concluded that information obtained through business transactions was more important than information obtained from public or private agencies to exporting firms expanding their export operations. However, they also suggested that participation in trade shows and trade missions are important export expansion tools, especially for new exporters.

These studies, which purportedly evaluated the usefulness of export promotion programs, generally failed to establish if the firms in the sample were aware of the programs. Thus, it is unclear whether the firms' views can be deemed as knowledgeable opinions. This point was emphasized in Ogram's (1982) study of Georgia firms and by Kedia and Chhokar's (1986) study of Louisiana firms.

Kedia and Chhokar evaluated firms' awareness, use, and the perceived benefit of seventeen export promotion services. The services analyzed in their study were offered by federal and state government agencies and by the private sector. Their survey was conducted through personal interviews and the respondents were told that the export services either existed or were being developed. This was done to mitigate the possibility of a respondent indicating that they were aware of a program, when they were in fact not. Survey participants will on occasion respond in this manner, so as to appear well-informed or to offer "socially desirable" responses. In general, Kedia and Chhokar found that most firms, exporting and nonexporting firms, were unaware of the export promotion services described in their survey. At best, only 48.9 percent of the firms in one survey subset indicated an awareness level of one for export promotion activities. Generally low levels of program awareness were found among firms in other studies, as well (Kathawala and Elmuti, 1990).

Interestingly, Kedia and Chhokar's survey sample consisted of subsets of machinery manufacturers and food processors operating in Louisiana. Their study is the only study in the international business literature to specifically identify firms in the food and agricultural sector. However, they were apparently unaware of the promotion programs offered by the USDA. In their discussion, they describe the federal agencies offering export assistance to include "the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Small Business Administration, the Agency for International Development, the Export-Import Bank, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation" (Kedia and Chhokar, p. 13). Yet, the questions in their survey were (intentionally) phrased in such a general manner that the program could be attributed to a state agency or several federal agencies, including USDA agencies.

The study by Byford and Henneberry of food processing firms in the Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma is, to date, the only published study which directly examines the effectiveness and value of government export assistance programs to agribusiness firms. However, their analysis on export promotion programs was rather limited in scope. Only 17.6 percent of their survey

respondents were active in export markets. Among these firms, 55.3 percent indicated that they participate in some government export program. However, none of these firms attributed their initial export sales to local seminars on export trade sponsored by state or federal government agencies. Most often, a firm's initial export sales are the result of an unsolicited order. The nonexporting respondents identified market information as the most important government service they could receive. Indeed, market information ranked higher than government-sponsored trade shows and trade leads.

Typically, the studies in the international business literature only provided descriptive summaries of their survey results. While they often suggested that differences may exist with regard to the views of different sample subsets (e.g. exporters vs. nonexporters), they failed to conduct hypothesis tests on these believed differences. These tests could have been easily conducted using classical statistical methods. The studies often did offer rankings on the export promotion activities based on firm awareness and perceived benefit. These rankings are useful for program administrators and policy makers.

One important issue revealed in the international business studies was the apparent ambivalent attitude of firms toward government export promotion programs. While they viewed them as potentially helpful, they also viewed them as intrusive in their business affairs (Kedia and Chhokar). This attitude was revealed in the study by Byford and Henneberry, as well. This question on the appropriate role of government in export trade has been debated recently and has affected some USDA export promotion program objectives (Lugar, 1994). Notably, the objective of the food aid program P.L. 480 Title I shifted away from commercial market development and surplus disposal and toward improving food security, providing hunger relief, and encouraging economic development



(Ackerman, Smith, Suarez, 1995) in the 1990 Food Agriculture Conservation and Trade Act.<sup>1</sup>

In the next section, Kedia and Chhokar's study is reexamined to determine what can be said about the export assistance programs administered by the USDA, noting that the food processors in their study would have fallen under the USDA's area of responsibility.

### **A Secondary Analysis**

Table 2 lists the export services analyzed in Kedia and Chhokar's study which was conducted in 1986. For each service, the table indicates whether the service is provided by the USDA, other federal or state agencies, or the private sector. Of the 17 programs examined by Kedia and Chhokar, seven of them can be identified as services provided by the USDA and other agencies. With these services identified, one can then evaluate their results to assess the effectiveness of these select USDA services. Further, the responses of the food processing firms and machinery manufacturers can be compared to determine if there are any significant differences. Kedia and Chhokar failed to present this analysis. This comparison will indicate whether firms served by the USDA are better informed than are firms served by other federal and state agencies. The rankings based on the expected benefits offered by the programs presented by Kedia and Chhokar are also reviewed. This will offer an indication on the value of these selected USDA export services to food processing firms. Firm awareness of export services is examined first.

Table 3A presents the proportion of food processing firms and machinery manufacturers indicating that they were aware of the export services described in Kedia and Chhokar's survey. A test for the difference in these proportions

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<sup>1</sup> Market development also remains an objective of the PL 480 Title I program.

(expressed as percentages) was conducted to determine if awareness differs across the two sectors. Under the null hypothesis that the population proportions are equal,  $H_0: p_{\text{food}} = p_{\text{machinery}}$ , a test statistic that is distributed as a unit normal ( $z$ -value) can be computed (Daniel, 1978). All that is required for the computation of this statistic are the sample proportions and sample sizes, as reported by Kedia and Chhokar.

The most striking result revealed in Table 3A is the low level of awareness of the export services offered by federal and state agencies by both food processors and machinery manufacturers. At best, less than one-third of the food processors were aware of USDA export services. It is also seen that the degree of awareness is not significantly different among these two groups of firms, as the null hypothesis of equal proportions is not rejected at conventional levels of significance under a two-tailed test.

Table 3B compares the awareness response rates of exporting food processors and machinery manufacturers. Again, a markedly low rate of awareness is observed among the firms in these sample subsets. Less than half the exporting firms in each sample subset indicated an awareness of the government services. It is also seen that the exporting food processing firms are no worse nor no better informed than exporting machinery manufacturers, as the null hypothesis of equal proportions is not rejected.

These results would suggest that the USDA is not succeeding in making firms aware of the export services it offers. However, the USDA is doing no worse than other federal and state agencies in this regard.

Kedia and Chhokar did query their respondents on their use of the export services. However, given the low levels of awareness, the number of actual users was very low. Given these limited number of observations, it is difficult to develop inferences from these data. Nevertheless, usage levels were generally high once firms became aware of the programs. They also asked the respondents if they

would use the program if they were aware of it. Here, professed expected usage levels were generally high. While this information is interesting, it is possibly more important to assess how beneficial the programs are to actual or potential users. This issue is reviewed next.

Kedia and Chhokar asked their survey respondents to indicate on a five point Likert scale the benefit they received or expected to receive from the export service. The points on their scale were defined as follows: 1= "no benefit," 3= "some benefit," 5= "extremely beneficial." Interestingly, their central point, three, is not described as a neutral position. Thus, one would be unable to assess whether the mean response rates are significantly different from a neutral position. Kedia and Chhokar calculated the mean responses for each export service for each sample subset. The mean responses of the food processors are reported in Table 4 for the services provided by the USDA. While it would be possible to test whether the response rates by food processors and machinery processors were significantly different, it would require the original data used to calculate the means, so that the sample variances could be computed. Unfortunately, these data have not been obtained. Further, it might have been desirable to calculate whether the mean response rates were significantly different from the expected mean value of three. However, the description of the scale presented by the authors, as discussed above, makes this analysis less meaningful and it also requires the original source data. Still, from the standpoint of policy makers it is important to know how these select USDA programs rank with regard to the benefit firms say they do or would provide. The rankings for these programs among these select seven USDA programs and the original 17 in Kedia and Chhokar's survey are presented in Table 4.

As can be seen from Table 4, food processors ranked a service similar to those provided under the GSM-102 and GSM-103 export credit guarantee programs as the most beneficial. Indeed, this service was ranked number one among the 17 export services in the survey. Assistance in settling trade disputes, a service provided by the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, was ranked second

among the USDA services. However, this service and the other USDA services were among the eight lowest ranked services in Kedia and Chhokar's survey. Trade missions ranked last. Further, its mean value was less than three, suggesting that little or no benefit is obtained from trade missions. Note, this contradicts Denis and Depelteau's finding for Canadian firms.

### **Summary and Suggestions for Further Research**

This paper reviewed studies in the international business literature which examined the effectiveness of government export promotion services. Several of the early studies in this body of literature suggested that these services only play a limited role in promoting export market entry and expanding current export operations. However, these early studies failed to establish whether the surveyed firms were aware of the export promotion services. Obviously, a program can not be effective if firms are unaware of it. Further, it is questionable whether the firm responses represented informed opinions. Later studies revealed that U.S. firms were largely unaware of the services provided by federal and state agencies. Ironically, the authors of these studies in the international business literature demonstrated a lack of awareness of the export promotion services offered by the USDA.

Although the survey by Kedia and Chhokar contained a sample subset of Louisiana food processing firms, these researchers also failed to acknowledge the role played by the USDA. Their survey results were reevaluated here so that inferences on the effectiveness of the facilitative export marketing services provided by the USDA could be made. It was found that the food processors in Kedia and Chhokar's survey were largely unaware of the services provided by the USDA and other federal and state agencies. However, when compared to the awareness levels of machinery manufacturers, they were no more or no less aware of such programs. It was revealed, however, that services like the export credit guarantees provided under the USDA's GSM-102 and GSM-103 programs are viewed as the most beneficial service by food processing firms.

While this reevaluation of Kedia and Chhokar's results provides some insight into the value and effectiveness of USDA export promotion services, the inferences developed here should be viewed with some caution for several of reasons. First, the results were developed from a small sample from a single region within the United States. Second, the survey was not specifically designed to assess the effectiveness of USDA services. Importantly, it does not cover all the services provided by that agency. Third, the survey was conducted more than ten years ago. Thus, care should be made in drawing conclusions on the effectiveness and value of USDA facilitative export marketing services until further research is conducted.

It is recommended that further research on the effectiveness of the USDA's facilitative export marketing services should be conducted. While making recommendations on improving the effectiveness of government programs has always been an important task for economists, it is believed that recent events make the suggested study particularly important. The tightening of federal funding for government programs is one compelling reason. Also, the recent agreements under the Uruguay Round of the GATT allow for the continued use of these export services, because they are viewed as nondistorting trade practices. The continued use of these programs suggests that they should be better understood, so that they may be conducted in an efficient manner. The stated policy objective of increasing U.S. food and agricultural product exports also point to the need to evaluate these services. Finally, recent public debates on government export services and government programs points to the need to carefully analyze the USDA export services.

In proceeding with an analysis on USDA facilitative export marketing services, which are mostly export information services, it is suggested that a national survey of U.S. agribusiness firms is the appropriate approach. The survey should attempt to determine firm awareness, use, and the perceived benefit of the services offered by USDA. Further, the survey sample should be designed to include exporting and nonexporting firms and firms of varying size. Information

on the responses of these different subsets could provide information on how to best target the export services.

It is recognized that there is extensive literature examining USDA information services (see Sumner and Mueller, 1989; Patterson and Brorsen, 1993). However, these studies typically focused on information services like the USDA crop report that provides information in a periodic manner to agents currently engaged in market transactions. Thus, event study methodology was atypically used, as price responses could be analyzed in a systematic manner (Chance, 1985). In contrast, the export market information services usually provide information in a nonscheduled manner to agents planning export transactions. Hence, an event study methodology is not appropriate.

The approaches used in analyzing the EEP and the MPP are not appropriate either. These studies relied on traditional economic models based on supply and demand equilibrium conditions to analyze the impact of these programs. In the case of the EEP, its impact in changing the quantity demanded was analyzed. In the case of the MPP, its impact in shifting demand was analyzed. The export market information services do not impact the market in these manners. Though, they may influence export supply. Still, a survey analysis is suggested as the best research approach. It is perhaps the only way to obtain information on firm awareness, use, and the perceived benefits of the programs.

Until further analysis can be conducted, little more can be said about the value and effectiveness of USDA facilitative export marketing services. New research, though, has offered some additional insights on this issue. At the time this paper was prepared, a preliminary report by Bills, Maestro-Schere, and Neenan (1996) on firm awareness, use, and the perceived value of USDA export services was also released. These researchers conducted a survey of firms using the USDA export supplier list for their sample frame. They found, like the studies reviewed and the inferences developed in this paper, that the firms were largely unaware of many of the services provided by the USDA. This finding is perplexing since the

sample was made up of firms identified as exporters by the USDA. It should also be noted that the views of nonexporting firms need to be evaluated as well. While this recent study makes a new contribution to this area of research, more work is needed.

**Table 1. Facilitative Export Marketing Services  
Provided by the USDA and Other U.S. Government Agencies**

Export Service	USDA Agency	Other Federal Government Agencies
General export counseling	FAS	DOC/ITA, SBA
Current information on foreign buyer interests	FAS (Trade Leads)	DOC/ITA (Trade Opportunities Program)
Foreign distribution of information on U.S. products	FAS (Buyer Alert)	DOC/ITA ( <i>Commercial News USA</i> )
Lists on foreign buyers	FAS (Buyer List)	DOC/ITA (Export Contact List) DOC/ITA (Agent/Distributor Service) DOC/ITA (World Traders Data Report)
Lists of U.S. suppliers	FAS (Seller List)	
Trade missions and trade shows	FAS	DOC/ITA
Export credit guarantees	FAS (GSM-102, 103)	EXIMBANK
Shipping and storage information	AMS	DOT/MA
Market information	FAS, ERS	DOC/ITA (Commercial Information Management System) DOC/BOC (Center for International Research) SBA (Export Information Service) DOS
Inspection certificates	APHIS, FSIS, GIPSA	
Foreign import requirements	FAS, APHIS, FSIS, AMS	DOC/TA (National Institute of Standards and Technology)



The program names are given in parentheses. The USDA agencies are defined as follows: FAS- Foreign Agricultural Service, ERS - Economic Research Service, ACS - Agricultural Cooperative Service, APHIS - Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, FSIS - Food Safety and Inspection Services, GIPSA - Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, AMS - Agricultural Marketing Service; DOC denotes Department of Commerce; The agencies in DOC are defined as follows: ITA - International Trade Administration, BOC - Bureau of the Census, TA - Technology Administration; SBA denotes the Small Business Administration of the United States; DOS denotes Department of State; DOT/MA denotes Department of Transportation, Maritime Administration; EXIMBANK denotes the Export/Import Bank of the United States.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1994; Delphos, 1990; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1992.

**Table 2. The Export Services Described in Kedia and Chhokar's Survey and the Agencies Providing These Services (1986)**

Export Service Described by Kedia and Chhokar	USDA	Other Federal Agencies	Private Sector, State Governments
Seminars lasting 1 to 2 days explaining the basics of exporting		*	*
General information on doing business in a particular country	*	*	*
Banking services which guarantees payment by qualified customers	*	*	*
Export service which buys your product(s) and resells overseas			*
Mailing lists of potential foreign buyers of your product(s)	*	*	*
Publicizing your new product(s) in foreign countries	*	*	*
Completely arranged foreign trips for exploration of market potential	*	*	*
Banking service which handles all financial aspects of the sale			*
Location of potential agents or distributors in foreign countries		*	*
General export counseling	*	*	*
Matching your product(s) with foreign buyers		*	*
Freight forwarder handling all paper work			*
Commercial information on active foreign importers who are good prospects		*	*

Table 2 (Continued).

Export Service Described by Kedia and Chhokar	USDA	Other Federal Agencies	Private Sector, State Governments
General commercial information on foreign firms		*	*
Researching market potential for your product(s) in specific countries			*
Assistance in settling trade disputes with foreign customers	*	*	*
Washington-based toll-free number for export related assistance		*	

**Table 3A. Indicated Awareness of Facilitative Export Marketing Services  
Food Processors and Machinery Manufacturers**

Export Programs	Food Processors (n=37)	Machinery Manufacturers (n=59)	z-Value
	← % of respondents →		
Assistance in settling trade disputes with foreign customers (Foreign Agricultural Service)	8.33	3.51	1.0198
Banking service which guarantees payment by qualified customers (GSM-102, GSM-103)	31.43	28.57	0.2986
Completely arranged foreign trips for exploration of market potential (Trade Missions)	22.86	23.21	-0.0396
General export counseling (Foreign Agricultural Service)	19.44	20.69	-0.1484
General information on doing business in a particular country (Foreign Agricultural Service)	19.44	30.51	-1.1999
Mailing lists of potential buyers (Buyer List)	32.43	19.64	1.4167
Publicizing your new product in foreign countries (Buyer Alert)	24.32	21.82	0.2842

The USDA program or the USDA agency providing the service is identified in parentheses. The z-value is distributed as a unit normal and tests the null hypotheses that the population proportions are equal ( $H_0: p_{food} = p_{machinery}$ ). The critical values under a two-tailed test at the five and ten percent levels are 1.96 and 1.645, respectively.

Based on results presented by Kedia and Chhokar.

**Table 3B. Indicated Awareness of Facilitative Export Marketing Services Exporting Food Processors and Exporting Machinery Manufacturers**

Export Programs	Food Processors (n=16)	Machinery Manufacturers (n=33)	z-Value
	← % of respondents →		
Assistance in settling trade disputes with foreign customers (Foreign Agricultural Service)	12.50	3.23	1.2565
Banking service which guarantees payment by qualified customers (GSM-102, GSM-103)	43.75	36.67	0.4765
Completely arranged foreign trips for exploration of market potential (Trade Missions)	31.25	36.67	-0.3733
General export counseling (Foreign Agricultural Service)	25.00	34.38	-0.6639
General information on doing business in a particular country (Foreign Agricultural Service)	25.00	48.49	-1.5688
Mailing lists of potential buyers (Buyer List)	43.75	33.33	0.7095
Publicizing your new product in foreign countries (Buyer Alert)	31.25	36.67	-0.3733

The USDA program or the USDA agency providing the service is identified in parentheses. The z-value is distributed as a unit normal and tests the null hypotheses that the population proportions are equal ( $H_0: p_{food} = p_{machinery}$ ). The critical values under a two-tailed test at the five and ten percent levels are 1.96 and 1.645, respectively.

Based on results presented by Kedia and Chhokar.

**Table 4. Food Processors' Evaluation on the Perceived or Expected Benefits of the Facilitative Export Marketing Services Provided by USDA**

Export Programs	Rank	Mean Benefit (n=37)
		(Scale: 1-5)
Banking service which guarantees payment by qualified customers (GSM-102, GSM-103)	1 (1)	3.84
Assistance in settling trade disputes with foreign customers (Foreign Agricultural Service)	2 (10)	3.27
Mailing lists of potential buyers (Buyers List)	3 (11)	3.25
General export counseling (Foreign Agricultural Service)	4 (13)	3.18
General information on doing business in a particular country (Foreign Agricultural Service)	5 (14)	3.17
Publicizing your new product in foreign countries (Buyer Alert)	6 (15)	3.06
Completely arranged foreign trips for exploration of market potential (Trade Missions)	7 (17)	2.77

The USDA program or the USDA agency providing the service is identified in parentheses. The values in parentheses indicate the ranking these programs received among the seventeen export services included in Kedia and Chhokar's survey. Program benefits were evaluated using survey responses measured by a five point Likert scale, where 5 = "extremely beneficial" and 1 = "no benefit."

Based on results presented by Kedia and Chhokar.

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