SHIPPING SWEETS
Turkeys Hill's ice cream sales extend into South America, Middle East

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More than half of the nation's ice cream exports are sent to three countries.
That includes the United Arab Emirates — No. 3 for U.S. ice cream imports — where quantities grew 76 percent last year and more than 900 percent since 2011, according to trade data from the U.S. Census Bureau.
The UAE is the largest of the ice cream-buying countries that Manor Township-based Turkey Hill Dairy Inc. deals with as it continues to build a foreign trade network that is crazy for its American ice cream.
"It's (still) a very small percentage," said Jeanmarie Nobile, an international sales representative for the Lancaster County manufacturer, citing international sales of less than 2 percent.
But that could increase with new markets regularly added to the churn.
Since 2004, the national ice cream and iced tea giant — which does at least $300 million in annual sales — has
grown its international sales to seven countries and Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory. Argentina was the latest addition.
"One good thing for us is that in South America, their winter is our summer," Nobile said. "When we slow down a little here, the focus is getting ice cream down there."

International sales
Bermuda, in 2004, was the company's first foreign market. That led to Chile and things progressed from there, she said: "It's something we dabbed in to start. We
did fairly well."
Turkey Hill grew into South America and then made the leap to the Middle East, where it often has exclusive agreements with distributors that work with retailers throughout a particular region or country.
Turkey Hill declined requests to disclose product volumes shipped to each of its overseas markets, which also include Bahrain, Bermuda, Chile, Colombia and Peru.
Census trade data provided by the International Dairy Foods Association showed that Chile was No. 14 last year for U.S. ice cream exports, followed by Bahrain at No. 21, Bermuda at No. 24, Colombia at No. 35 and Peru at No. 53.
"Right now, we want to grow in current markets before moving into new areas," Nobile said.

Helping hand
Like many regional manufacturers, Turkey Hill works with World Trade Center Harrisburg and follows up on leads from trade shows, Nobile said.
"It's a very long process," she said. "It can take about a year to cultivate a lead."
Shipping the products overseas, which can take several weeks in some cases, also can be a challenge, she said.

But that is always improving with new technology, said Beth Hughes, the IDFA’s director of international affairs.

“This is a growing market for us,” she said of ice cream exports, citing disposable income growth among the middle-class populations in these developing countries. “There are more players in the industry who are looking to exports as a way to grow their business.”

Exporting also could help save a U.S. manufacturer when domestic sales dip in a poor economy, added Peter O’Neill, executive director of the Center for Trade Development in the Office of International Business Development at the state Department of Community and Economic Development.

“There is a great hunger for American products, of all kinds,” he said, adding that his office is trying to push more companies into the foreign market by increasing their comfort level.

That takes a lot of research on foreign markets — from current trade volumes and shipping costs to identifying sales channels and vetting potential partners in those countries. Paying attention to the geographic footprint of your industry is just as crucial, O’Neill said.

“You need to be aware of what your competitors are doing,” he said. “You don’t want to be blindsided because you never saw them coming.”
Flex operator Jaclyn Chambers adds lids to an ice cream production line at Turkey Hill Dairy in Lancaster County.