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While much of the debate on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has centered on future US investments in Mexico, over the past few weeks a handful of Mexican companies took steps to expand their operations into the US. Two of those companies, hosiery manufacturer Grupo Synkro and financial broker Abaco Casa de Bolsa, reached agreements or entered into negotiations to expand their presence in the US market. A third company, tortilla flour manufacturer Grupo Industrial Maseca (Gimsa), announced plans to build three new plants in the US Midwest. On Oct. 19, Mexico City-based Grupo Synkro offered US$3 million to purchase the bankrupt Miami-based US hosiery company Sheffield Industries. According to Kenneth Welt, asset manager for Sheffield Industries, Synkro bid for Sheffield's physical facilities including machinery as well as for its brands and commercial rights. Welt said Synkro has proposed a complete remodeling of the Sheffield plant. The transaction is subject to approval by Sheffield's debt holders, who are currently owed about US$9 million, and by a US bankruptcy court. Sheffield filed for Chapter 11 protection in a US bankruptcy court in January of this year. Meanwhile, on Oct. 22, Gimsa announced that its expansion plans for 1994 include construction of new plants in Kentucky, Illinois and Indiana, each with the capacity to produce about 180,000 MT of corn meal per year. With this expansion into the Midwest, Gimsa hopes to take advantage of the growing US market for packaged tortillas. Three of the company's four existing plants in the US are located in states bordering Mexico—Texas, California and Arizona. The fourth plant is in Georgia. Gimsa, which operates 16 plants in Mexico, is also the country's largest manufacturer of corn meal and is expected to open new large-scale operations in Veracruz and Chiapas states next year, as well as smaller plants in the Central American countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Finally, on Nov. 1, Monterrey-based financial services company Abaco Casa de Bolsa reached an agreement to acquire 51% of the Chicago-based Rodman & Renshaw Capital Group. According to the New York Times, Abaco beat out the New York investment banking house Josephthal Lyon & Ross, which was considered to have the inside track to acquire most or all of the Chicago firm. However, Abaco won the bid by offering US$10.50 per share, compared to Josephthal’s US$9.00 per share. The transaction, which is pending a final Abaco review as well as shareholder and regulatory approval, would expand the company's presence in the US, since it would acquire Rodman's properties in the Midwest and on the West Coast. Abaco currently operates a brokerage subsidiary in New York. (Sources: La Jornada, 10/20/93; Notimex, 10/08/93, 10/19/93, 10/22/93; New York Times, 11/02/93)