



Foreign Agricultural Service

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## **Honduras**

## **Exporter Guide**

**1999**

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### **Report Highlights:**

**U.S. trade data indicates that U.S. exports of consumer-oriented and edible fishery products to Honduras reached a new peak in U.S. fiscal year 1999 at \$57 million.**

**U.S. exports to Honduras in these categories increased by 23 percent in FY 1999 and have doubled from 1995 levels. Rapidly developing retail and HRI (hotel/restaurant/institutional) sectors should continue to fuel the upward trend in U.S. exports to Honduras in the coming years.**

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Includes PSD changes: No  
Includes Trade Matrix: No  
Scheduled Report

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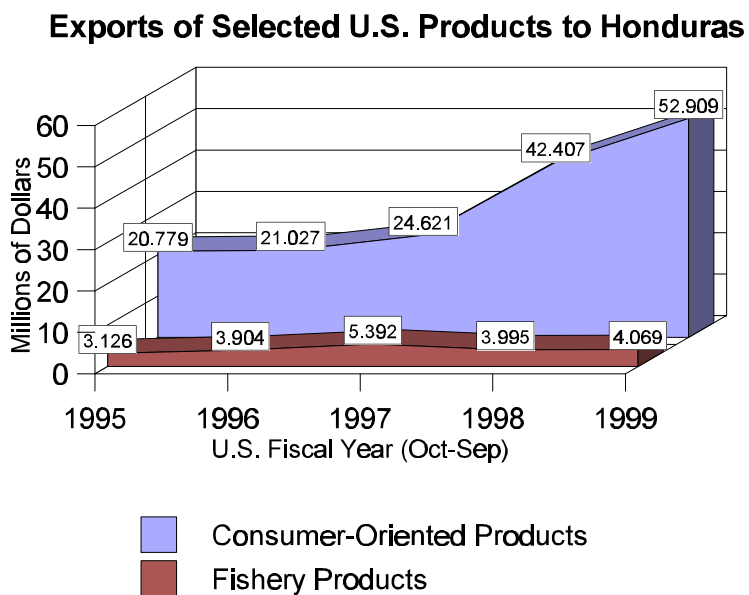
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## SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

After three quarters of robust economic growth in 1998, Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras during the last days of October 1998. In addition to the catastrophic losses caused by the hurricane (some five thousand reported deaths and nearly 40% of the population directly affected by the storm), Mitch dashed Honduras' hopes for a sustained economic expansion. The hurricane is estimated to have caused \$3 billion in damages to the Honduran economy, equal to about 50% of annual GDP. Preliminary statistics from the Honduran Central Bank indicate that GDP growth for 1998 was 3% while inflation increased by 15.7% (the corresponding figures for 1997 were 4.5% and 12.8%, respectively). The GOH's emergency spending the last two months of 1998 coupled with plummeting tax collections as the economy stalled, caused the fiscal deficit to rise to 3.2% for the year (versus 2.8% in 1997). The external current account deficit increased to about 3% of GDP because of the decline in exports in the last two months of 1998 and the rise in imports associated with national reconstruction. The nation's net international reserves closed 1998 at \$660 million, equivalent to 3.4 months' imports, but down \$70 million from the \$730 million recorded on July 31, 1998. Although 1999 has been a difficult year at best with GDP contracting by about 3 %, the economy is expected to rebound, albeit moderately, as international

assistance continues to flow and productive sectors regain strength.



*\* Based on trade data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census*

Despite Mitch, imports of consumer-oriented products continued their upward momentum, reaching \$217 million in 1998 according to U.N. data. Several factors are contributing to the increase:

\* Strong demand, and considerable investment and development in the retail and HRI sectors is encouraging greater imports from all sources, and particularly from the U.S.

\* Honduras has made great strides in opening its markets to foreign trade and foreign investment.

\* Import duties, which had ranged as high as 140%, have been brought down to between 1 and 20 percent for almost all products.

\* Surcharges, customs administrative charges and consular fees have been abolished. Honduras has also done away with most non-tariff barriers to trade, including import licensing requirements. The administrative customs charge was eliminated for raw materials in 1998.

This progressive trade liberalization has been largely responsible for propelling U.S. exports to Honduras from \$627 million in 1991 to \$2.4 billion in 1998, according to U.S. trade data.

### Family Income and Consumer Spending

- Annual per capita income is less than \$800, thus a large share of income goes to food purchases.
- In rural areas close to 75% of family income goes to buy food; in urban areas it is about 50%.
- For food and beverage products, price is the most important selling factor in Honduras.
- Although more women are entering the work force every day, women remain the main decision makers when it comes to food purchases.
- U.S. products are often preferred based on quality, wholesomeness, and variety.

<i>Monthly Household Income</i>			
<i>Lempiras</i>	<i>U.S. Dollars 1/</i>	<i>No. of Households</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Up to 100</i>	Up to 6.80	13,912	1.23
<i>101 to 250</i>	6.81 to 17.00	32,410	2.86
<i>251 to 500</i>	17.01 to 34.01	72,267	6.38
<i>501 to 1,000</i>	34.02 to 68.03	142,789	12.60
<i>1,001 to 2,500</i>	68.04 to 170.07	333,197	29.40
<i>2,501 to 5,000</i>	170.08 to 340.14	249,234	21.99
<i>5,001 to 10,000</i>	340.15 to 680.72	134,395	11.86
<i>10,001 and more</i>	680.73 and more	62,852	5.55
<i>Unreported Income</i>		92,153	8.13
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>		1,133,209	100.00

1/ - Exchange rate: U.S. Dollars 1.00 = Lempiras14.70

Source: Household Survey, Statistics & Census Directorate, March 1999.

## SECTION II. EXPORTER BUSINESS TIPS

As in most Latin American countries, a good personal relationship with prospective customers is basic to penetrating the market. While it may take a little longer than is customary in the U.S. to consummate a business relationship, the investment in time can pay off in long-lasting and mutually profitable alliances.

U.S. exporters must take into account that for marketing purposes, Honduras is divided into two regions; the North Coast, including San Pedro Sula, the country's commercial and industrial capital; and the Central region, where Tegucigalpa, the political capital, is located. Large importers and distributors in Honduras usually have offices in both cities to take advantage of market opportunities. In other instances, large international firms have granted exclusive distributor rights, i.e., one exclusive distributor in San Pedro Sula and another in Tegucigalpa. These types of arrangements are acceptable under current Honduran laws.

The principal-agent relationship in Honduras is governed by the civil and commercial codes; Supreme Decree 549, Official Register (La Gaceta) No. 22366, of December 7, 1977. This law is entitled "Law of Agents, Distributors and Representatives of National and Foreign Enterprises," and includes a provision for penalties for wrongful termination that discourages exclusive distribution agreements. Principals may not terminate the contract without just cause, unless they fairly compensate the agent for damages suffered. Only Honduran nationals or Honduran legal entities registered with a local chamber of commerce and the Ministry of Industry & Trade may represent foreign firms.

Foreigners exporting to Honduras are not required by law to sell through an agent or distributor, except when selling to the government. Although a U.S. firm may export directly to Honduran companies, appointing a local agent or representative is strongly recommended to help with import procedures, sales promotion and after-sales service. Independent intermediaries are especially important for smaller companies, as their knowledge of the market and of the relevant business customs and practices adds to the strength of the U.S. manufacturer/exporter.

U.S. companies are advised to evaluate local prospects in terms of the services and benefits provided, considering factors such as location, financial strength, quality of the sales force, warehousing facilities, reputation in the market, outlay on advertising, product compatibility and overall experience.

The availability of adequate service and support frequently makes the difference in purchasing decisions, especially by the government. In general, it is important to secure sales through an established, reputable distributor that offers an adequate service infrastructure. U.S. companies should consider providing training, technical assistance, and after-sales support to their local counterparts.

### Advantages and Challenges Facing U.S. Products in Honduras

<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Challenges</i>
<i>— Close proximity to U.S. Containerized cargo from main gateway cities can be transported to Honduras in 3-4 days.</i>	<i>— Labeling requirements differ from U.S. regulations making it more difficult to import a variety of products to Honduras. All products must be labeled in Spanish and exhibit an expiration date.</i>
<i>— Consumers have a strong preference for U.S. products. U.S. products enjoy a high quality image among most Hondurans.</i>	<i>— The overall size of the Honduran market is small. This restricts direct imports mostly to local distributors that can handle consolidated cargo and can store foods for prolonged periods of time. The small market size also limits the willingness of foreign suppliers to provide support for new product lines.</i>
<i>— Rapidly developing retail sector and HRI sector. There is a strong presence of U.S. fast food outlets and casual dining restaurants which help promote U.S. foods. The introduction of new U.S. hotel chains is also helping in this regard.</i>	<i>— Relatively high duties on some products, inconsistent customs valuation practices, and the government's inability to adequately police its borders, encourages contraband imports. This makes for an uneven playing field for many distributors, wholesalers and retailers.</i>
<i>— Increased availability of specialized equipment such as walk-in coolers and deep freezers have permitted year-round availability of U.S. produced fruit, such as apples, pears &amp; grapes.</i>	<i>— Unclear and occasionally restrictive sanitary import requirements make for uncertain and often difficult import process.</i>
<i>— Direct imports by small warehouse outlets have diversified food imports. The biggest winners: U.S. food products and pet specialties.</i>	

Because of high interest rates, importers/distributors, as well as Government of Honduras agencies, often have problems in securing the funds to purchase imports. U.S. exporters that offer attractive financing terms on sales to Honduran traders have the best chances of gaining market share. This is particularly true for large-scale projects. It is important to emphasize, however, that international firms must exercise due caution when granting credit to Honduran trading partners. Firms should take care to investigate the creditworthiness and reputation of potential partners before granting credit.

U.S. exporters should keep in mind the relatively small size of the Honduran market and the high elasticity of

demand for consumer products when devising marketing strategies. Price is one of the most important elements that influences the receptivity score of most Honduran imports. In many cases, Honduran business people buy directly from abroad if they feel that the cost of imports available in the local market is too high. U.S. exporters should carefully analyze both the cost approach and the market approach when making pricing decisions.

Price escalation represents another important consideration in terms of export retail pricing. Products imported into Honduras are usually priced based on the C.I.F. value, import duties, in-country transportation costs, and distributor margins.

### **Trademarks**

To be protected under Honduran law, trademarks must be registered with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Trademarks are valid up to 10 years from the registration date. “Notorious marks” are protected under the Pan American Convention (1917), to which Honduras is a party. Illegal registration of a notorious mark, however, must be contested in court if the original holder is to exercise the rights.

### **Food Standards and Regulations**

U.S. suppliers should also be aware that although enforcement of existing food safety laws and regulations has generally been lax in the past, the situation is changing. The Consumer Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce and Consumer Protection Agency of the Attorney General’s Office are raising consumer awareness about food safety issues which puts more pressure on the Ministry of Public Health and on the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock to enforce existing legislation. At present, all labels are required to be in Spanish and to display an expiration date. Closed dating is not allowed. Disputes between importers/retailers and government authorities over this matter are on the rise.

Although the import process is fairly transparent for practically all products, certain difficulties often take place with sensitive products such as poultry meat. U.S. suppliers should ensure that their Honduran customers are fully aware and in compliance with all import requirements. This may entail providing Honduran importers with certificates of origin, certificates of free sale, certificates of wholesomeness, phyto and zoosanitary certificates, and other export documentation as required. More in-depth information on labeling and other import requirements can be found in our FAIRS report (HO9007).

## SECTION III. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE AND TRENDS

There are no statistics as to the size of the food and beverage market in the retail, HRI food service, and the food processing sectors. However, UN trade data shows total imports of consumer-oriented products and edible fishery products in 1999 were \$217 million and \$13 million respectively. It is estimated that the retail sector accounts for approximately 80 percent of these imports, and the other two sectors for approximately 10 percent each.

### A. Retail Sector

Honduras' retail food sector is varied. Urban consumers shop at large open market places, American-style supermarkets, specialty and convenience stores, and local 'mom & pop' stores known locally as 'pulperías.' Supermarkets represent a relatively small share of about 24% of overall retail food and beverage sales when taking into account the entire retail market. However, when looking at the developed retail market in major urban areas this share may be as high as 40 percent. Retail sales of imported consumer-oriented products are conducted mostly by supermarkets, even though smaller stores also sell imported products. In most cases, it is the large and modern supermarkets which cater to the consumer-oriented product demands of higher income groups. The supermarket retailing industry is growing rapidly. Virtually all the supermarket chains are expanding, remodeling, and modernizing. Larger chains in neighboring countries have also formed strategic alliances with chains in Honduras or are opening up stores of their own. Local wholesale outlets and warehouse clubs have been increasing in popularity lately. PriceSmart, a U.S. based warehouse club, has recently opened a store in San Pedro Sula and plans to open another in Tegucigalpa in 2000.

Christmas gift baskets are also becoming increasingly popular. In recent years, it has become common to include a high percentage of U.S. products in the basket. Most commonly included are traditional favorites such as wines, whiskey, candy and nuts. Easter, besides being a religious holiday, could also be defined as summer vacation time for the vast majority of Hondurans. This vacation period begins well before and extends well beyond the two day holiday. Other than the Christmas season, Easter is the main peak for retail sales. Substantial opportunities exist for U.S. suppliers willing to promote their products during this time and gear their promotional campaigns toward this end. U.S. suppliers should not expect to do much e-commerce with their Honduran customers for the time being. The vast majority of the estimated 40,000 internet subscribers use the internet as an information tool and not as an avenue for conducting business. Difficulties in product delivery across borders and Honduran businessmen's preference for traditional business communication play a large role in this regard.

The best marketing entry approach is to appoint a local distributor in Honduras that can provide good penetration, distribution support & availability of products. However, many U.S. suppliers stop at that either because they are short-sighted or discouraged by small initial volumes. U.S. exporters looking to be successful in supplying the Honduran retail market in long run, must be willing to go the extra mile in developing sales from the ground up and servicing their customers. They should be able to work with their customers to satisfy local labeling requirements, provide their customers with competitive pricing, credit alternatives, catalogs, and samples to test the market. They should also be willing to consider co-op advertising for new brands. Moreover, they should also be willing to provide technical and sales support as well as training in various areas such as category management, merchandising, and product handling. For further information on this



sector, please see our Retail Sector report (HO9014).

## B. HRI (hotel/restaurant/institutional) Food Service Sector

In Honduras the HRI (hotel/restaurant/institutional) food service sector is in its infancy. Nonetheless, several distributors are venturing into this sector and a few specialized companies are beginning to focus on this dynamic market. Although development in the tourism industry has been slowed to some extent by hurricane Mitch, it continues to offer enormous potential and is already exhibiting signs of materializing. The Government of Honduras is trying to capitalize on the country's abundant natural and historical resources by creating legislative incentives which will attract foreign investment in the sector. So far, much of Honduras' tourism sector is concentrated on the Bay Islands and in the Copan Ruins.

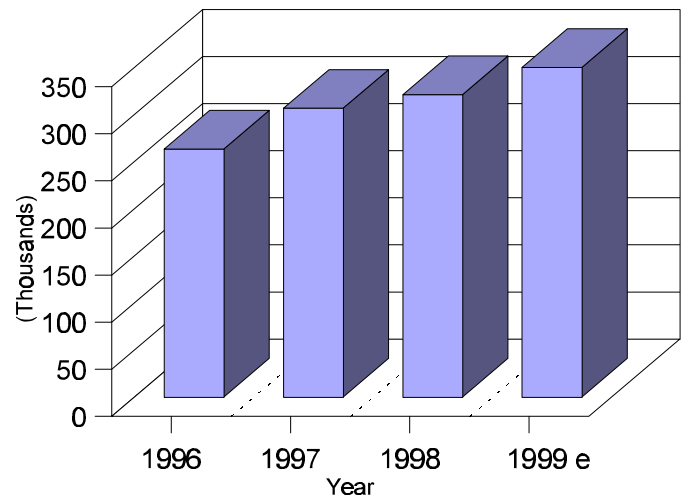
On Honduras' Bay Islands, the majority of consumer-oriented products are purchased from grocery wholesalers in Florida, particularly Miami and Tampa. The islands have several shrimp companies that export directly to those ports. Those companies also own most of the supermarkets on the islands and even some of the largest hotels. These companies send shrimp to the United States and return with U.S. consumer-oriented products and housewares. On the mainland demand from hotels and restaurants, which has been traditionally sluggish, is beginning to expand exponentially. According to the Honduran Tourism Ministry, as of August of 1999 there are 55 new hotel/tourism projects either planned or underway, including several U.S.-owned hotel projects. The restaurant business is also getting a big boost from the introduction of U.S. casual dining establishments such as TGI Friday's, Applebee's and Ruby Tuesday's, and the continued expansion of U.S. fast food chains and mall eateries. Large U.S. food service suppliers such as SYSCO and others have recently entered Honduras and are helping their local representatives develop the market. However, sourcing food and beverage products from a wide array of suppliers is still quite common in the sector. The same basic market entry approach described for the retail sector also applies to the HRI food service sector.

## C. Food Processing Sector

Domestic food processing is a small yet growing industry in Honduras. The industry is composed of two distinct segments. The first segment of the industry is made up of a rather large number of small and unsophisticated entrepreneurs throughout the country which produce wheat products, dairy products, meat products, honey, certain prepared fruit products and others. Honduras lacks production of canned fruits and vegetables as well as chocolate products. As many domestic food processors seek to improve the quality of their products, and with the lifting of major trade restrictions, food additive imports are also beginning to experience some growth.

The second sector is made up of several medium to large scale operations with relatively modern production and marketing facilities. These businesses produce pasta products, sauces, vegetable oil and shortening,

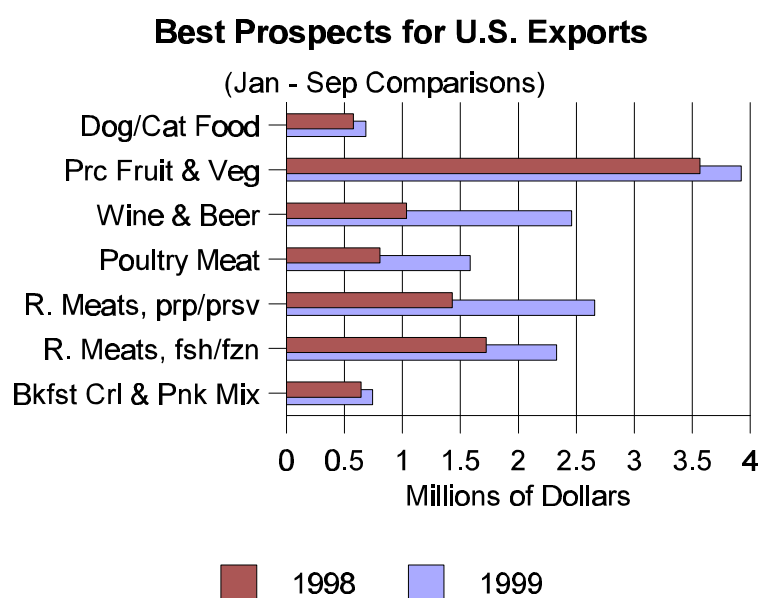
**Number of Tourists Visiting Honduras**



Source: Honduran Ministry of Tourism

cookies and biscuits, certain snack foods, fruit juices, soft drinks, beer, tortilla flour, meat products, and dairy products. This segment is struggling to modernize and develop in order to remain competitive, particularly in relation to imports from neighboring countries and Mexico. One local group is investing heavily to become one of the region's top suppliers of snacks, several processed food products, and soaps. However, for many others remaining competitive in the global marketplace is proving to be an uphill battle. Perhaps the best approach in this sector is working closely with the local manufacturers who know consumer tastes and preferences for their products. Providing these customers with technical assistance in diversifying product variety can be invaluable in increasing sales of different ingredients.

## SECTION IV. BEST HIGH-VALUE PRODUCT PROSPECTS



\* Based on trade data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census

Following is a list of product categories with the best export potential for U.S. suppliers based on recent export performance, relative ease of entry, and developing trends.

- ' Snacks
- ' Breakfast Cereals & Pancake Mix
- ' Red Meat, fresh/chilled/frozen
- ' Red Meats, prepared/preserved
- ' Poultry Meat
- ' Fresh Fruit

- ' **Processed Fruit & Vegetables**
- ' **Wine & Beer**
- ' **Pet Foods**
- ' **Colas & Non-Alcoholic Beverages**
- ' **Frozen Bread & Pastry Products**

## SECTION V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

Institution: Office of Agricultural Affairs  
American Embassy  
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Tel: 011(504) 238-5114  
Fax: 011(504) 236-8342  
E-mail: usdafaas@hondudata.com

Institution: Office of Agricultural Affairs  
American Embassy  
Address: Avenida Reforma, Zona 10  
Guatemala, Guatemala  
Tel: 011(502) 331-1541  
Fax: 011(502) 331-8293

Name: Dra. Sonia Benítez  
Title: Director  
Institution: División de Control de Alimentos (Food Safety Division),  
Secretaría de Salud Pública (Ministry of Public Health)  
Address: Barrio Morazán, Frente a Estación de  
Bomberos, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.  
Tel.: 011 (504) 232-1139  
Fax: 011 (504) 232-2713

Name: Ing. Carlos Betancourth  
Title: Director General  
Institution: Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria (Plant & Animal Health Service),  
Secretaría de Agricultura y Ganadería (Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock)  
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Name: Lic. Rufo Paredes

Title: Director General

Institution: Dirección General de Protección al Consumidor (Consumer Protection Directorate)  
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## APPENDIX I. STATISTICS

**TABLE A. Key Trade & Demographic Information**

Agricultural Imports From All Countries, 1998 (\$Mill) / U.S. Market Share (%) 1/	404 / 53
Consumer Food Imports From All Countries, 1998 (\$Mill) / U.S. Market Share (%) 1/	217 / 44
Edible Fishery Imports from All Countries, 1998 (\$Mill) / U.S. Market Share (%) 1/	13 / 25
Total Population, 1999 (Millions) / Annual Growth Rate (%)	5.9 / 2.8
Urban Population, 1999 (Millions) / Annual Growth Rate (%)	2.6 / 3.0
Number of Major Metropolitan Areas,, 1999 2/	2
Size of the Middle Class, 1999 (Millions) / Growth Rate (%) 3/	0.7 / 2.6
Per Capita Gross Domestic Product, 1999 (U.S. Dollars) 4/	791
Unemployment Rate, 1999 (%) 5/	12
Per Capita Food Expenditures (U.S. Dollars)	n/a
Percent of Female Population Employed, 1999 6/	39.1
Exchange Rate, Nov. 1999 (US\$1 = Lempiras) 7/	14.70

1/- Based on UN data.

2/- Populations in excess of 350,000

3/- Number of people living in households with monthly incomes between Lps 5,000 and 10,000 (US\$ 340 to 681). Actual size of the middle class may near 1 million if the definition is expanded to include households with monthly incomes of up to Lps. 15,000 (US\$ 1,020) and given the high rate of people (8%) not responding to government surveys.

4/- Estimate

5/- Estimate. Open unemployment is low; however, underemployment approaches 27%

6/- Percent of women who are part of the economically active population.

7/- Average exchange rate in 1998 was US\$1 = Lempiras13.81.

**TABLE B. Consumer Food & Edible Fishery Product Imports**

<b>Honduras Imports</b>	<b>Imports from the World</b>			<b>Imports from the U.S.</b>			<b>U.S. Market Share</b>		
	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>
	(\$ Millions)			(\$Millions)			(Percent)		
<b>CONSUMER-ORIENTED TOTAL</b>	145	185	217	52	83	95	36	45	44
Snack Foods (Excl. nuts)	9	12	14	1	2	3	12	20	19
Breakfast Cereals & Pancake Mix	9	14	17	1	2	2	12	11	10
Red Meats, Fresh/Chilled/Frozen	3	2	3	1	1	2	13	36	60
Red Meats, Prepared/Preserved	1	3	6	1	1	3	31	45	42
Poultry Meat	1	5	5	1	1	1	28	15	23
Dairy Prod (Excl. Cheese)	26	30	38	4	13	15	15	41	40
Cheese	1	1	3	1	1	2	38	80	57
Eggs & Products	6	8	10	1	1	1	4	7	12
Fresh Fruit	1	5	6	1	5	4	41	88	73
Fresh Vegetables	2	3	4	1	1	1	33	33	29
Processed Fruit & Vegetables	9	14	14	3	6	9	37	42	65
Fruit & Vegetable Juices	5	6	6	3	5	3	56	79	49
Tree Nuts	1	1	1	1	1	1	97	92	82
Wine & Beer	1	2	2	1	1	1	63	74	63
Nursery Products & Cut Flwrs	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	32	6
Pet Foods (Dog & Cat Food)	1	1	1	1	1	1	28	47	63
Other Consumer-Oriented Products	69	79	88	36	44	48	52	56	55
<b>FISH &amp; SEAFOOD PROD.</b>	5	7	13	1	2	3	19	28	25
Salmon	1	1	1	1	1	1	36	100	100
Surimi	1	1	1	1	1	1	100	95	77
Crustaceans	3	4	9	1	1	2	21	19	25
Ground Fish & Flatfish	1	1	1	1	1	1	62	98	86
Molluscs	1	1	1	1	1	1	92	47	20
Other Fishery Products	2	3	3	1	1	1	12	38	26
<b>AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS TOTAL</b>	300	435	404	157	259	215	52	60	53
<b>AG, FISH &amp; FORESTRY TOTAL</b>	314	485	430	161	298	225	51	61	52

Source: FAS' Global Agricultural Trade System using data from the United Nations Statistical Office

**TABLE C. Top 15 Suppliers of Consumer Foods & Edible Fishery Products****Honduras Imports****CONSUMER-ORIENTED AG TOTAL (\$1,000)**

	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>
United States	51.957	82.687	95.166
Guatemala	22.486	28.269	36.019
El Salvador	20.474	28.993	33.776
Mexico	7.470	10.406	12.482
Costa Rica	7.810	7.310	8.404
New Zealand	6.737	6.929	6.341
Netherlands	3.859	1.419	5.491
Nicaragua	4.687	5.899	3.583
Panama	1.007	699	2.438
Canada	770	1.015	2.252
Ireland	5.132	3.796	2.042
Chile	2.730	2.995	2.039
U.K.	1.006	218	1.155
Australia	114	0	930
Spain	369	337	774
Other	8.584	4.006	4.474
<b>World</b>	<b>145.218</b>	<b>184.973</b>	<b>217.394</b>

**FISH & SEAFOOD PRODUCTS (\$1,000)**

	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>
United States	910	2,034	3,264
Panama	145	878	2,845
Nicaragua	491	6	1,388
Costa Rica	739	847	1,106
El Salvador	1,209	1,543	1,034
Colombia	245	393	1,023
Spain	10	422	683
Mexico	156	312	409
Thailand	576	258	261
Hong Kong	1	1	221
Taiwan (Est.)	0	0	178
Venezuela	88	194	162
China (PRC)	0	0	98
Guatemala	23	1	82
Ecuador	0	0	28
Other	227	409	41
<b>World</b>	<b>4,820</b>	<b>7,295</b>	<b>12,819</b>

Source: United Nations Statistics Division

Note: The UN statistics in the above tables may not coincide with U.S. export data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census.