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Honduras

Retail Food Sector

Report

2000

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Report Highlights:

Honduras' retail food sector continues to modernize as the supermarket and wholesale club concept builds appeal among consumers. Total food sales are expected to increase by as much as 20 percent for 2001, bolstering U.S. food imports by as much as 10%. There are ample opportunities for U.S. companies to enter the market. Best prospects include: frozen pork and beef cuts, cheese, sausages and deli-meats, pet foods, nuts and breakfast cereals, among others.

> Includes PSD changes: No Includes Trade Matrix: No Annual Report Guatemala [GT1], HO

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SECTION I. MARKET OVERVIEW

A. Macroeconomic Outlook

During the five years prior to 1998, the Honduran economy had grown at an average rate of 3.9 percent per year, in real terms. In 1999, the crushing damages to productive infrastructure and losses to agricultural exports resulting from Hurricane Mitch, caused the economy to contract by 1.9 percent. However, for the year 2000, the economy has regained upward momentum, and GDP is expected to grow by as much as 5 percent.

Economic reactivation has resulted from the recuperation of exports of top-earning agricultural products such as coffee, bananas and cultivated shrimp, and the dynamic increase in garment manufacturing, food, beverage and tobacco production, and metal products.

For the year 2000, the rate of depreciation of the local currency (Lempira) against the US dollar has slowed to 3.5 percent per year, while inflation is targeted to remain at 11%. GOH figures indicate that Honduras' trade deficit has decreased by USD 145.5 million, as a result of an 21.4% increase in exports and a 1.2% increase in imports, in absolute terms. However, in relative terms, the growth rate of imports of goods and services (excluding hurricane-relief donations) is expected to remain at around 9.3% per year. Foreign exchange remittances from U.S .relatives to Honduran households have grown by 51 percent, and are estimated at USD 365 Million in 2000. The steady and increasing inflow of "hard currency" has allowed recipient households to increase disposable incomes and food expenditures. Total foreign direct investment is

estimated at USD 1.3 Billion, with some USD 850 million proceeding from US investors.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI), a measure of the cost of the basic basket of goods and services, shows a cumulative increase of 8.3 percent as of October 2000; resulting primarily from increases in the price of fossil fuels, rent, electricity, food and non-alcoholic beverages, and shoes and clothing.

Honduran households spend relatively more money on food than in education and health. Food and nonalcoholic beverages account for 31.8 percent of the cost of the basic basket. Consequently, Honduran consumers are extremely sensitive to price changes in food items.

The national monthly average for food expenditures per household is USD 55.36 (Lps. 836.00).

Weights of Consumer Expenditure Items on the Consumer Price Index				
Item	%			
Food, and non-alcholic beverages	31.8			
Tobacco and alcoholic beverages	0.4			
Shoes and clothing	8.2			
Rent, electricity, water and fossil fuels	19.3			
Furniture and household goods	6.7			
Health	3.7			

Source: Central Bank of Honduras, 2000

A breakdown of expenditures shows that, in average, households allot 20.5% of their income in staple grains (corn, rice and beans), 17% in fish, chicken and beef, 11% in milk and dairy products, 10% in fruits and vegetables, 8% in bakery goods and 33% in other food products.

Transportation

Personal Care

Education

TOTAL

Communications

Leisure and culture

Restaurants and hotels

Rural households spend considerably less money in meat and dairy products, and more in staple grains. Urban consumers are more prone to purchasing processed, preserved and ready-to-eat food items.

Income distribution is concentrated in the upper class, with 58% of the income in the hands on the richest 20% bracket, while more 40% of the population lives with under \$ 1 per day.. National per capita income is USD 722 (UNDP, 1999), with urban workers earning 1.5% above, and rural wages workers earning 43% below the national average.

B. Retail Market

- Income distribution largely determines the consumption patterns of imported food products (often considered as luxury items). Due to extreme income inequality, the market for imported food products is effectively reduced to urban and peri-urban population, estimated at 2.9 million people in 2000.
- The target population is concentrated in the capital city of Tegucigalpa and in the industrial hub of San Pedro Sula. Together, these cities account for roughly 80 percent of food imports. The remainder of the market is located in smaller cities such as El Progreso, La Ceiba, Choluteca and the Bay Islands.
- Supermarkets and wholesale clubs share of retail food sales at the national level has increased to about 42%, up by 2% in the last year. The remaining 58% of the food retail sales is allotted to small stores, convenience outlets and traditional markets.
- Small 'mom & pop' stores (known as pulperias) and traditional mini-markets total approximately 5700 in Tegucigalpa, and 3,900 in San Pedro Sula. Both cities combined account for 55% of the total number of small stores in the country.
- Supermarkets and wholesale clubs carry a larger and more varied inventory of imported food products on a consistent basis, thus accounting for the largest volume of sales of consumer-ready (canned, preserved, processed, frozen and chilled) food products.
- Purchasing habits among consumers continue to evolve favorably for imported food products, as urban consumers are now more likely to buy in a supermarket type outlet than before.
- The membership discount club and bulk purchasing concepts have taken a strong foothold on the Honduran market, as the number of warehouse outlets and variety of items has increased.
- Consumers and retailers alike continue to have a strong preference for U.S. food products, which are regarded as being of superior quality in comparison to local or regional products.
 - In addition, with U.S. food products becoming more competitively priced, an increasing share of urban middle-low income homes are becoming avid buyers of American food items. Middle-high and upper income homes are typically highly aware of and loyal to U.S. branded food products.

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C. Advantages and Challenges of Selling U.S. Products in Honduras

Advantages	Challenges
Hondurans continue to view U.S. products as of higher quality and safer than national and regional products.	Labeling regulations require that imported food and beverage products be labeled in Spanish and that expiration dates be clearly marked. Closed or coded data is not acceptable.
Increasing penetration of U.S. investment in the food retail sector is augmenting brand awareness and creating more competitive market conditions for American firms to capitalize on.	Overall size of the market remains small in comparison to neighboring countries, which hampers direct imports from U.S. manufacturers, as local distributors and larger retailers can only handle consolidated product loads (with each item typically less than a truck load).
Increasing number of modern cooling and freezing equipment in supermarkets allow for year-round availability of U.S. fresh fruits and vegetables, and frozen products	Some imported food items cost more than local or regional product substitutes, making U.S. food products a luxury item for the largest share of the Honduran population.
Changing consumer habits and effective market promotion are likely to continue increasing demand for U.S. products.	Complicated procedures to clear customs, relatively high tariffs on selected products, and changing phytosanitary import restrictions.
Local importers have experience and like trading with U.S. firms	Inconsistent custom valuation practices, and contraband imports create an uneven playing field for many distributors, wholesalers and retailers.
Macroeconomic reactivation is likely to increase household incomes for urban dwellers and bolster food expenditures in general.	Recent signing of Mexico-Honduras trade agreement will increase competition for U.S. products, especially for highly price-sensitive consumer segments.

SECTION II. MARKET STRUCTURE AND SUB-SECTOR PROFILES

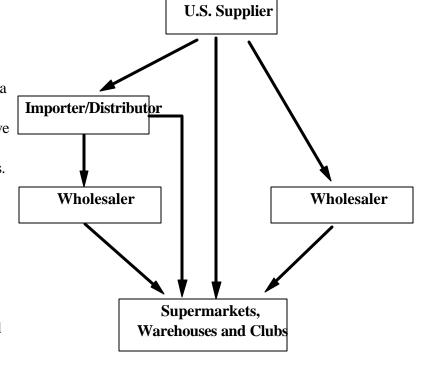
A. Supermarkets, Hypermarkets and Club & Warehouse Outlets

Distribution Channels

The Honduran distribution channel follows a typical supplier, wholesaler and retailer chain. The bulk of imported products move from U.S. suppliers to local importers/distributors and finally to retailers.

In most cases, U.S. suppliers are wholesalers, which consolidate less-thantruck-load cargo volumes for Honduran importers.

A typical 40-foot container imported to Honduras will carry 20 to 40 different food items. Nearly 80 to 85% of U.S. food imports are bought from large suppliers in Miami, Florida.



However, some U.S. suppliers are able to sell directly to local wholesale outlets and supermarkets. Major club outlets outsource selected food items through their corporate purchasing operations, and are able to bypass the local distribution chain.

Local importer/distributor firms will carry a wide stock of brands and products at the same time, although some firms hold exclusive distribution permits for selected brands. Some supermarkets import exclusive food lines and use them as private label brands in their stores. U.S. firms seeking to enter into distribution services should exercise caution with local exclusivity laws and regulations.

Typically, expect importers/distributors to take responsibility of clearing customs, merchandising, marketing and, in some cases, transporting products to retailers. There are four food distributors with capacity to supply both Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula markets: DIAPA, CODIS, Distribuidora Solis and DIMERC.

Entry Strategy

Success in introducing products in the market depends on local representation and personal contact. Selecting a distributor is the easiest and fastest way to enter the market. Appoint a distributor that has a wide customer base, and

that can provide extensive penetration and distribution support to your products. It is best if the distributor has previous experience in supplying supermarkets, hypermarkets and club outlets. U.S. firms are advised to meet and get to know the operations of potential distributors prior to establishing commercial agreements.

The local representative or distributor should be able to provide market knowledge, and guidance in local business practices and trade laws, as well as sales contacts. In many cases, the local representative or distribution will also be the importer. U.S. firms are advised to seek formal legal representation, as some food products require proper registration with the Honduran Health Ministry, as well as proper labeling codes according to local food safety regulations. The FAS and FCS offices in the U.S. Embassy in Tegucigalpa maintain listings of companies and lawyers to help guide U.S. firms through this process.

In order to improve the odds of success in entering the market, U.S. suppliers should provide labeling or re-labeling services, competitive pricing, credit, catalogs, printed material and samples to importers/distributors. Firms should also consider providing support to importers in order to develop sales, by way of shared advertising costs for new brands.

Name & Outlet Type	Ownership	Sales (\$ in Millions) ¹	No. of Outlets	Location	Purchasing Agent Type
La Colonia Supermarket	Honduras	39	7	Tegucigalpa	Direct & Importer/Distributors
PALI Supermarket	Costa Rica	15.9	10	Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula	Direct & Importer/Distributors
Price Smart Wholesale Club	U.S.A.	15	2	Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula	Direct & Importer/Distributors
MAXI Supermarket	Costa Rica	14.3	4	Tegucigalpa	Direct & Importer/Distributors
STOCK Wholesale Club	Honduras	13	1	Tegucigalpa	Direct & Importer/Distributors
Junior Supermarket	Honduras	13	1	San Pedro Sula	Direct & Importer/Distributors
ABC/Sula Supermarket	Honduras	13	6	North Coast	Direct & Importer/Distributors
Mas x Menos Supermarket	Honduras	10	2	Tegucigalpa, Choluteca	Direct & Importer/Distributors
Comisariato Los Andes Supermarket	Honduras	9.9	1	San Pedro Sula	Direct & Importer/Distributors

Company Profiles

UNCLASSIFIED

Name & Outlet Type	Ownership	Sales (\$ in Millions) ¹	No. of Outlets	Location	Purchasing Agent Type
YIP Supermarket	Honduras	9.5	1	Tegucigalpa	Direct & Importer/Distributors
K-Diprova Wholesaler	Honduras	4	2	Tegucigalpa	Direct & Importer/Distributors
El Centro Supermarket	Honduras	3.3	1	San Pedro Sula	Direct & Importer/Distributors
ELDON Supermarket	U.S.	1.9	1	Roatan	Direct & Importer/Distributors
Total:		161.8	39		

/¹ Sales figures are estimates obtained from industry sources

Trends and Highlights

- Honduras' supermarket food sales for Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula have increased by 14% in the year 2000, to approximately \$ 162 Million, topping 1999 sales estimates by more than \$ 20 Million.
- Supermarkets continue to account for approximately 40% of food sales and 25% of beverage sales at retail. However, the entry of wholesale clubs has forced supermarkets to conduct more aggressive advertising and price discounting.
- Retailers continue to demand high-volume discount prices regardless of their purchasing volumes.
- Overall, wholesale clubs like STOCK and Price Smart outsold supermarkets by almost 2.5 times in 1999. Prorated yearly sales per supermarket outlet average \$ 3.7 Million, while yearly sales for wholesale club outlets average \$ 9.3 Million.
- The supermarket sector is still in flux, and gravitating heavily towards consolidation. Two major chains have bought out smaller competitors or ailing supermarkets, while others are adding new stores throughout the country. However, the net effect for 1999 shows a 4.8% reduction in the number of outlets, a decline of 2 outlets, for a total of 39
- The membership discount club and bulk purchasing concept has gained acceptance among consumers, as many find wholesale clubs much more suited for a one-stop-shopping experience, from food to electronic consumer goods. Food sales account for 20 to 25% of gross sales in wholesale clubs, where non-food products are rapidly establishing a niche.
 - No hypermarkets are present in the market at this time, although Price Smart has begun to introduce small satellite service stores inside their showroom.

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- Sales of fresh fruits and vegetables continue to rise, as increased investments in the cold chain allow for longer shelf life of perishable items. More agile import logistics allow consumers to purchase fresher fruits and vegetables at the retail stand. Two major supermarkets receive up to two shipments of frsh fruits and vegetables per week Apples, pears and grapes are now available all-year round.
- Sausages, hams and other deli meat products have taken a strong foothold, as prices have become extremely competitive compared to local deli products.
- American-style prime beef and pork cuts are also on the rise, especially flavored pork cuts and ribs.
- High growth for dairy products such as fresh and cultured cheese, especially those of well-known brands such as Kraft and Borden.
- Frozen and refrigerated ready-to-eat foods and desserts continue to post mixed results. Slow demand growth and high costs for these products restrict retailers from buying full truck loads. Individual retailers complain that it is logistically impossible

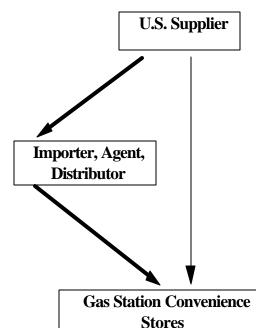
for them to consolidate refrigerated and dry food items aboard one container. Hence, retailers rely on local specialized importers to purchase frozen food items.

B. Convenience stores, Marts and Kiosks

Distribution Channels

Since purchasing power is considerably smaller, nearly all convenience store chains rely on local importers and distributors to buy their products.

Many of the same companies that supply supermarkets also supply the convenience stores.



The largest convenience store chain (Star Mart, owned by TEXACO) has shown increasing interest in importing directly from U.S. suppliers.

In Honduras, convenience stores are exclusively operated by gas stations all over the country. Major petroleum transnational firms have established a strong niche in this food retail segment. Proceeds from convenience stores represent 5 to 7 percent of the total sales for gas stations.

Average store size does not exceed 300 square feet, and sales range from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per month, depending on the location of the associated gasoline station. Most convenience stores are located along main boulevards and busy avenues in major cities. Smaller, less elaborate store formats can be also found along main roads in the country.

Convenience stores offer 24-hour service all-year round.

Convenience stores specialize in fast foods, hotdogs, sandwiches and pizza, but also carry high-quality imported goods such as snacks, cookies, assorted candy, chocolates, ice cream, sodas, beer, deli meats and groceries. Around 60% of these products are imported from the U.S. Pricing strategies vary among store chains, typically ranging from 30 to 50% above supermarket level prices, to those competing with supermarket pricing on basic food items and beverages.

Entry Strategy

The procedure for entering the convenience store market is much the same as for supermarkets. Success in introducing a product depends on local representation and personal contact. It is best to appoint a distributor in Honduras that can provide sound penetration and distribution support to your product.

Although these stores purchase imported goods through local suppliers, the majority of goods are subjected to brand and space management policies set by the gas companies. It is recommended that U.S. firms try to establish direct contact with gas company executives, in order to pitch new products into company-managed convenience stores. However, sellers should also be prepared to negotiate with individual dealers and assume some credit risk for privatelyoperated stores.

Retailer	Ownership	Sales (\$ in Millions) ¹	No. of Outlets	Locations	Purchasing Agent Type
Star Mart	Texaco	10.6	21	Nationwide	Importer / Distributor
Food Mart	Texaco	9.4	26	Nationwide	Importer / Distributor
Select	Royal Shell	2.4 *	10*	Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba	Importer / Distributor
Super 7	DIPSSA- local	1.5	8	Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula	Importer / Distributor
Petrosun	Local	0.5	2	Roatan	Importer / Distributor
Eco Mart	COPENA - local	n/a	n/a	San Pedro Sula	Importer / Distributor
Total		24.4	67		

Company Profiles

/¹ Sales figures are estimates obtained from industry sources

/* Indicate 1998 figures.

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Trends and Highlights

TEXACO owns the largest chain of convenience stores, with 43% share of the market, offering gas station owners the choice of setting up a franchised higher-end store (Star Mart) or a privately-owned lower-end one (Food Mart).

- The number of convenience store outlets increased by 43%, up 20 outlets from 47 in 1999, to at least 67 in the year 2000. Largest increases have been posted by Food Mart outlets (up by 14 stores) and Super 7 (up by 6 stores).
- Food sales through convenience stores are estimated to have increased by at least 55%, mainly as a result of higher number of outlets in the market, and new store formats designed to attract new customer segments and more customer traffic.
- Larger convenience store chains now lease space to fast-food restaurants, such as Pizza Hut, Wendy's and Pollo Campero to set up drive-thru and carry-out services.
- Increasing competition has lead stores to reduce profit-margins by as much as 10%, however, still remaining 30 to 40% above supermarket price levels.
- SUPER 7 stores are becoming more family-oriented by offering kid meals and treat in their menus. Tiger Market stores are opening playgrounds where families can take children out to play, or can be rented for hosting birthday parties. These chains are leading the effort to break away from the traditional perception that convenience stores only targeted the late-night juvenile crowd.
- Stores carry a greater variety of basic groceries, such as fluid milk, cheese, eggs and bread, and ready-made dinner items, in an effort to appeal to working parents with limited time to cook meals at night.
- Nearly 60-70% of all food products sold are imported from the US, indirectly, through local distributors.

C. Traditional Markets and Small Independent Grocery Stores

Entry Strategy

There are two types of traditional market in Honduras. One is the open-air farmer's market, where growers intermediaries sell their products directly to consumers. Typically, each grower has a make-shift stand and sells his product every day. These markets are highly heterogeneous, but primarily concentrate in fresh fruits and vegetables and basic staple grains (beans, corn and rice). The second is the corner store, known as 'pulperia', which is typically a mom & pop type operation. The number of these stores is huge, with some 5700 in Tegucigalpa, and 3,900 in San Pedro Sula. Both cities combined account for 55% of the total number of small stores in the country.

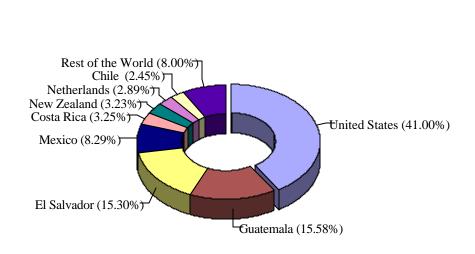
Penetration to the mom & pop type stores can be achieved by selling to an established local importer. Access requires direct delivery, 60-90 day credit terms, first position and shelf-space incentives, displays and promotions. A direct marketing strategy aimed at these outlets is not recommended. Point of sale material is often used and promoted by suppliers in these type of outlets. Reliable distribution logistics is the key to grow market share in this store segment.

Trends and Highlights

- Traditional farmers' markets still pull much of their product directly from local producers and small wholesalers.
- Small stores represent approximately 45 to 50 percent of food sales at retail, and over 65 percent of nonalcoholic and beer sales.
- Local bottlers (PEPSI and Coca-Cola) continue to diversify their retail sales strategies by expanding sales promotions directly to small stores and beverage wholesalers, bidding for the exclusivity rights of these outlets to sell their products.
- Small stores carry a limited inventory of products and have higher unitary prices than supermarkets.

SECTION III. COMPETITION

In the aggregate, U.S. market share of consumer-oriented agricultural imports is estimated at 41%, with several individual food categories, like fresh fruit, tree nuts, wine and beer, cornering more than 60% of the local market. Likewise, U.S. share of imports of fish and seafood products is estimated at 43%. The total value of U.S. imports of consumer-oriented ag. products increased by 5.1% for 1999, in absolute terms. However, the interannual growth rate for 1998-99 shows a slowdown of 6%, in relative terms, when compared to previousyear import figures. For 2001, U.S. food imports are expected to rebound, and grow by as much as 15%



Market Share of Food Imports

Honduras, 1999

Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Costa Rica are the U.S. main competitors for the Honduran import food market.

European and South American suppliers face more difficulty in competing with U.S. counterparts, due to proximity, high perception of American products in the local market, and long-standing commercial ties with Honduras.

The recent signing of a Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and the northern triad of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) will allow Mexican imports to increase presence in the market, and become a more serious

competitor for U.S. goods.

Mexico already has a large presence in the bread and snacks categories, with brands such as Sabritas, Bimbo and Marinela cornering as much as 15% of all Mexican food imports to Honduras. These imports include the distribution of U.S. licensed products to Sabritas, such as the Frito Lay brand.

Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica, combined, account for roughly 35 percent of the market share of food imports. This share is held primarily by brands such as Dos Pinos (dairy products from Costa Rica), Diana & Bocadeli (sweet snacks and candy from El Salvador), Kerns, Royal & Del Monte (canned products and gelatins from Guatemala) and Nabisco & Eskimo (biscuits and ice-cream from Nicaragua).

New Zealand and the Netherlands are important suppliers of powdered and instant milk, accounting for roughly 6 percent of the market for consumer-oriented products, but more than 65 percent of dehydrated milk-based products. Increasing New Zealander investment in dairy processing plants in El Salvador are likely to bolster the presence of their products in Honduras.

Chilean imports continue to gain ground, especially in the wine and fresh fruit (grapes) categories, however their presence account for less than 2.5 percent of total food imports.

SECTION IV. BEST PRODUCTS PROSPECTS

A. Products present in the Market with Good Sales Potential

Extremely rapid growth (> 50% change in sales)

- Breakfast cereals
- Tree nuts
- Red meats, chilled or frozen (especially prime pork and beef cuts)
- Beer

<u>Rapid Growth</u> (> 30% and < 50% change in sales)

- Cheese
- Dog and cat foods (dry type)
- Red meat, preserved/prepared (especially sausages and deli-meats)
- Fruit and vegetable juices

<u>Above average growth</u> (< 12% and < 30% change in sales)

- Processed fruit and vegetables
- Fresh fruits (especially apples, grapes, pears and plums)

B. Products not present in the Market, because of significant barriers or that will not do well

Given that per capita income in Honduras is very low, food items that carry a high price tag will usually sell sluggishly, especially if lower price substitutes are available in the market. Some high-end wines and gournet foods may fit this category. However, U.S. suppliers seeking to sell these type of products should target supermarkets that cater to upper class buyers and that carry a wide variety of high-end products.

Other imports are banned or hampered by labeling, sanitary and/or product registration requirements. Best examples of these products are fresh, frozen poultry meat and eggs. With increasing pressure from local poultry growers, further tightening of poultry imports is expected, possibly even reaching to pre-cooked and flavored chicken cuts.

There are import quotas on other items, such as corn and rice. For a complete explanation and review on how to export food to Honduras, please refer to our Exporter Guide 2000 at <u>www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/default.asp</u>.

SECTION V. POST CONTACT AND FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, or need assistance exporting to Honduras, please contact the Office of Agricultural Affairs at the address listed below:

Office of Agricultural Affairs U.S. Embassy Avenida La Paz Tegucigalpa D.C., Honduras Tel: 011 (504) 236-9320 Fax: 011 (504) 236-8342 Email: <u>usdafas@hondudata.com</u>

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