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MARKETING MODULES SERIES

Marketing Module 5: Product

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Foreword

A marketing strategy is something that every single food and agriculture-related business (farms, wholesalers, retailers, etc.), no matter how big or small, needs to have in place in order to succeed in the marketplace. Many business owners in the food and agriculture sector in New York State and elsewhere are hesitant to set up an actual marketing strategy because they simply do not know how to go about developing it. How to better market their products and services remains a primary concern among New York State food businesses as a result.

In response to this need, we offer this Marketing Modules Series of eight modules which constitute a comprehensive training course in marketing management. The overall goal of this series is to improve the marketing skills of food business managers and owners in New York State so that they can develop successful marketing strategies to increase business profitability. More specifically, these Marketing Modules are intended to support the efforts of extension specialists and extension educators as they develop marketing training programs for their stakeholders.

Module 1 (Marketing) offers an overview of the series and discusses the basic pillars of a marketing strategy. Modules 2, 3 and 4 (Customer, Company and Competition, often referred to as 'The 3 Cs') focus on key concepts and techniques to conduct market analysis. Modules 5, 6, 7 and 8 (Product, Price, Placement/Distribution and Promotion, or 'The 4 Ps'), hone in on the essential elements of marketing tactics.

To facilitate their use in extension-related educational activities, modules tow to eight consists of three components: 1) a summary of the fundamental concepts, 2) a real-world example relevant to the New York State food and agriculture system to illustrate these concepts, and 3) a set of teaching slides to be used in training sessions and other educational activities in which these modules can be used individually or in combination. Because Module 1 (Marketing) is an overview of the whole series it only includes components 1 and 3. Examples for each of the sections in Module 1 can be drawn from the other seven Modules.

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The complete Marketing Modules series can also be accessed online at: http://hortmgt.gomez.dyson.cornell.edu/Marketing-Modules.html.

1. What is a Product?

A product is anything that can be offered for sale to satisfy a need or a desire. As such, marketed products include physical goods (e.g. foods, clothes), services (e.g. phone or cable), persons (e.g. famous movie star or football player), places (e.g. touristic destinations), organizations (e.g. Red Cross, Cancer Association) and ideas (e.g., weight loss programs, cooking programs). Here we will focus on tangible products, and specifically on food products.

A product can be described as the "bundle" of characteristics and benefits that buyers perceive they will obtain by purchasing it. Product characteristics include physical or functional aspects such as size, color, design, ingredients etc., while benefits (the non-physical/non-functional aspects) encompass aspects such as convenience, comfort, prestige, etc. The characteristics and benefits of a product should address the needs, wants and expectations of consumers in the target market.

1.1 Types of Products

There are many different types of products, depending on the target market selected, consumers' motivation to buy them and the complexity of the purchase process. Because these factors have an impact on the marketing strategies to be used, it is critically important to know where your product(s) fall, among the following general categories:

- Consumer products: targeted at end users (e.g., breakfast cereals, bottled juices, yogurt)
- Industrial products: used in the production of other goods (e.g., corn syrup and molasses for the baking industry)
- Commodities: products with few, if any, perceived differences between them (e.g., potatoes, cabbage, etc.)
- Specialty products: have highly unique characteristics compared to other competing products that make buyers to value them and make a special effort to get them. Their purchase usually involves extensive comparisons with other goods and lengthy information searches (e.g., fine liquors).
- Convenience products: purchased frequently with minimal effort (e.g., milk, eggs)
- Value-added products: save time in preparation and consumption. Consumers are usually willing to pay a higher price for the convenience (e.g., pre-cut fruits, pre-washed bagged salads, prepared meals, etc.)
- Impulse products: those for which the purchase is stimulated by immediate sensory cues (e.g., the aroma of fresh baked bread or freshly brewed coffee)
- By-products: the result from the manufacture of another product (e.g., cocoa butter)

Note: your product(s) could fall into one or more of these categories!

1.2 Key Attributes of Food Products

From a marketing point of view, perhaps the most important attributes of food products are quality, safety, availability, packaging and labeling, as described below.

Quality: consumers' perception of quality encompasses objective and subjective components. Objective components relate to the ingredients, vitamins, minerals, etc. while the subjective components relate to the taste, enjoyment and satisfaction a consumer experiences when using the product. Freshness and safety (absence of pathogens and/or toxic agents) are also included in consumers' quality evaluation of foods. Today's consumers expect a high level of quality and, for this reason, there is limited opportunity to compete in terms of quality alone.

Safety (food safety): consumers expect food retailers to provide them with clean, appropriately handled and safe products. Food safety starts at the farm and has to be maintained throughout the distribution chain, all the way to the consumer's table. Use of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), which are discussed later in section 5, along with maintenance of the cold chain throughout the product distribution chain, are key to ensuring food safety.

Availability: consumers like to find the products they want at all times in a place that is convenient to them. Appropriate channels of distribution as well as strategically located points of sale are of great importance in satisfying this expectation. In the fruit and vegetable industry, for example, imports of off-season products have contributed to the development of year-round supply for most products, allowing marketers to satisfy consumers' expectations.

Packaging : packaging serves a functional purpose by protecting food from spoilage, contamination and breakage. Also, packaging facilitates product handling, transport, storage and display while providing information about uses, ingredients, and shelf life. Packaging also serves a very important non-functional purpose in communicating and promoting an image of quality of a product through its design, label, color, brand and display. For agricultural products, packaging is the only feature that allows customers to distinguish between different production origins or marketers. Origin identification and recognition influence preferences and brand loyalty among consumers.

Labeling: the label positions the product in the eyes of the consumer. It draws him/her to the product and influences the purchase decision. The label can also inform by listing ingredients, nutritional content, health claims, recipes and usage tips. It may also serve as a promotional tool by telling the product's story. It is estimated that at least two thirds of Americans look at labels to find out more information about how food was produced. Keep in mind that the label must appeal to your target costumer and not just to you!

1.3 The Demand for Food Products

Consumers' needs and expectations vary according to their demographic and psychographic characteristics. Demographics are the characteristics of a population such as age, gender, education, marital status, household characteristics, life stage, ethnic background, occupation and income level. Psychographics relates to consumers' attitudes, values and interests which define their particular lifestyle. Changes in lifestyle with important impacts on food marketing include: a rapidly aging population, an increasing number of women joining the workforce, a growing

number of dual-income households, less time and desire to buy, prepare and eat foods at home, and an increasing awareness and concern about health, food safety and the environment.

1.3.1 Consumers' Key Motivators

As is the case for any other product, the demand for food products is the result of consumers' behavior. This, in turn, is determined by consumers' motivations and attitudes. Motivations derive from consumer-related variables such as: general norms or values of the society to which they belong, family/reference groups, and the socio-economic situation of the consumer. Attitudes towards a product are determined by consumers' motivations, by their previous consumption experience, and by their perception of the product and its attributes. The main motivations in consumers' demand and consumption of food include nutritional needs, health, enjoyment (taste, diversity, social events), convenience, safety, compliance with the norms of a reference group and environmental/political reasons.

Nutritional needs: every consumer has certain requirements for energy and nutrients, depending on their age, weight, gender, working conditions, climate and specific lifestyle, etc.

Health: consumers are increasingly aware of the health benefits of consuming fruits and vegetables but there might be significant differences in actual consumption between males and females as well as among the different age groups. Overall, however, there is a growing demand for "health foods" such as: calorie-reduced, dietetic foods, low/no cholesterol foods, low carbohydrate foods, etc.

Enjoyment: the demand for quality, diversity, specialties and products which offer more than just nutrition is growing. Consumers want to consume tasteful and diverse foods as well as to purchase, prepare and eat food in special ways (e.g., barbecue parties, specialty restaurants, farm stands, etc.).

Convenience: today's consumers like to minimize the effort they put into buying, preparing and consuming food. Examples of these type of products include, but are not limited to: pre-cut produce, frozen foods, ready-to-eat dishes and fast food.

Safety: consumer's perception of the safety of foods is often significantly influenced by episodes of food poisoning and the scandals surrounding them. As a result, there is a growing interest in controlled and properly labeled foods, organic foods, and buying directly from the farmer.

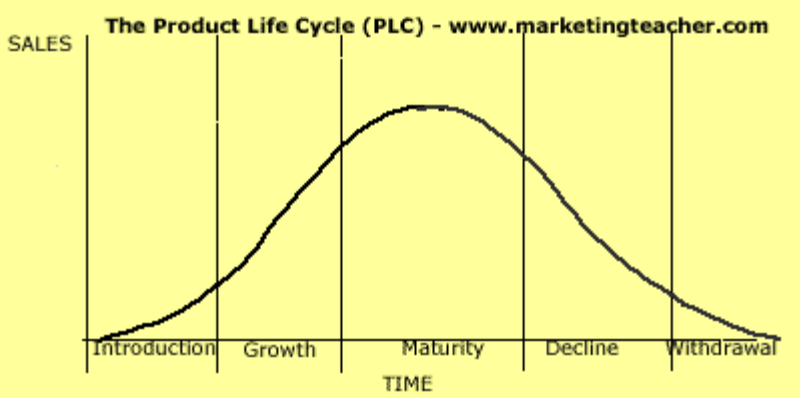
Compliance with the norms of a reference group: in general, consumers like to comply with the norms of their reference groups. Conforming to reference groups' norms is often combined with prestige as a motivation for consumption. Examples include avoiding pork for religious reasons and eating caviar and drinking champagne for prestige reasons.

Environmental/political reasons: demand for certain products might be motivated by consumers' concern about the environment (e.g., organic food, products from sustainable

agriculture) or for political reasons (e.g. preferring locally-grown products to support local farmers).

2. The Product Lifecycle (PLC) and What it Means to your Firm

The life cycle of a product (PLC) is the graphic representation of the evolution of its sales over time. The traditional product life cycle curve is divided into four stages: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline (and eventually withdrawal). The graph below illustrates a typical product lifecycle curve. However, not all products follow this cycle exactly or go through all four stages. Therefore, the product lifecycle graph should be used as a general illustrative model and not as a prescriptive tool.



2.1 Introduction

When introducing a new product, a firm's objective is to stimulate demand for it. Therefore strong promotion to create awareness among consumers is used. Typically this stage is characterized by slow growth and almost no profit. However, if the product has none or only few competitors a "skimming price" (setting high initial prices to "skim" the market) strategy can be employed and higher revenues can be accrued. *For more information on Skimming Pricing see Marketing Module 6: Price.*

2.2 Growth

This is a stage of increasing product acceptance and substantial profit improvement. Sales rise rapidly as more and more customers purchase and repurchase the product. However, at this point an increasing number of competitors often rush into the market with similar offerings. Firms' spending on advertising becomes high and focused on brand building. Market shares tend to stabilize.

2.3 Maturity

Sales continue to grow during the early part of this stage but eventually slow down and plateau with a corresponding decline in profit. A large number of competitors have entered the market by this time and all are attempting to differentiate their products on the basis of the brands they have developed during the growth stage. Market segmentation is used extensively during this period. Intense competition and price wars are the norm and, as a consequence, firms' profits decline. Promotion becomes widespread and producers start leaving the market due to the low margins.

2.4 Decline

At this stage the product is displaced by either, new and innovative products introduced to the market, and/or by consumers' changing tastes. Intense price-cutting takes place and as sales and profits continue to decrease, products are withdrawn from the market. Profits can only be achieved or improved by reducing marketing expenses and/or by cutting costs.

2.5 Limitations of the PLC

As noted above, some products may not exactly follow this life cycle curve. In addition, the length of each stage varies and not all products go through all four stages. Changes in consumer behavior and preferences as well as the effect of external forces (e.g., economic growth, inflation and lifestyle changes) also influence the life cycle of a product. Furthermore, marketers' decisions can result in significant variations of a product's life cycle curve. For example, they can prolong the maturity stage through product repositioning or move very quickly from maturity to decline via aggressive price-cutting.

Nevertheless, the product life cycle curve provides valuable insight for a firm in that it helps one visualize the evolution of product sales and profits over time. It highlights the importance of continual marketing research, prompt attention to new marketing strategies and, particularly, of developing new products which will fuel the firm's profits while other products decline and/or are withdrawn from the market.

3. What is Product Strategy?

Product strategy is one of the four key components of a firm's marketing mix. The other three components are price, promotion and placement (distribution). Product strategy encompasses the decisions you have to make regarding your firm's products, and includes:

- What products to produce and sell
- How many products to have in a product line
- How many product lines to have (product mix)
- What brand name to use
- Whether to use individual branding or family branding

- What logo to use
- Whether to use product bundling (selling more than one item at a time such as pasta and salsa together) or product lining(selling the item by itself, such as the pasta or the salsa separately)
- What positioning strategy to use
- What products to discontinue
- What new products to add

3.1 The Product Line

A product line is a group of closely related products offered for sale by a single firm. They are said to be closely related because they perform the same function, are sold to the same group of consumers, are marketed through the same channels and/or lie within a given price level. Usually they are products in which a particular firm has its strengths. The major product line decision a firm faces relates to its length, or the number of products it will include. Line length is a function of a firm's objectives and resources.

Example:
Product line: Fresh vegetables
Line length: corn, carrots, cabbage, pumpkins, etc.

3.2 The Product Mix

The product mix is the assortment of product lines and products offered by a particular firm. Typically the product mix is measured in terms of its "width", "length" and "depth". Width relates to the number of product lines offered, length relates to the number of products in each line and depth relates to the number of versions of each product in the line.

Example: For a farm store that offers fresh fruits and vegetables

Product mix width: Fresh vegetables, fresh berries, cheese

Product mix length:
Vegetables: corn, carrots, cabbage, pumpkins, etc.
Berries: strawberries, raspberries and blueberries
Cheese: cow cheese, goat cheese, sheep cheese

Product mix depth:
Carrots: regular, pre-cut, baby

3.3 New Products - What You Need to Know

In the process of developing new products, a firm identifies several potential opportunities, evaluates them, weeds out the least attractive ones, ascertains consumer perceptions, develops the product, tests it and finally introduces it to the market. A starting point for your firm in the identification of new product opportunities is to evaluate your current product mix: what product line(s) do you offer and how deep are they? This type of assessment will allow you to identify any existing "gaps" that can be filled with new products or modifications of existing ones. When

considering new products, beware of product cannibalization: you should avoid introducing new products that will adversely affect the sales of your existing products, unless they are in the decline stage. New products fall into three main categories: real innovations, adaptive replacements and me-too products, as described below:

Real innovations are unique products for which there are true needs but no existing satisfactory substitutes. This is very rare in agricultural products and more typical of manufactured food products. The more innovative the product is, the higher the profit potential as well as the risk involved.

Adaptive replacements are products that introduce significant changes which can replace existing products, such as new varieties of fruits and vegetables or their organic versions. New agricultural products most often fall in this category.

Me-too or imitative products are new to the producer but not to the market. These are the least risky among new products but also the least likely to generate high profits.

Be aware that the rate of failure for new products is relatively high. Some of the reasons for failure are poor planning or bad organization, poor timing, a lack of differential advantage, increasing competition and ever-changing consumer demands.

4. Marketing Strategies You Can Use with Your New or Existing Products

To increase the potential for success of your new products and/or to extend the life cycle of your existing products, you can differentiate them, add value to them, brand them, capitalize on the packaging, use powerful names, etc. Creativity is the key!

Differentiate your Products: to differentiate your products from those of your competitors you can change their physical characteristics (size, color, ripeness, packaging), modify their availability (in stores, by phone or online), incorporate services (delivery, information, training), create a new image (through a symbol, an event or the media), modify prices, suggest new uses, emphasize quality and customer satisfaction, etc.

Add Value to Your Products: value- added products have features that go beyond the conventional products. Opportunities to add value to your products include, but are not limited to: cleaning, cooling, cooking, combining, churning, culturing, grinding, hulling, extracting, drying, smoking, handcrafting, labeling, packaging, distribution, information, education and entertainment. Examples of value-added foods are pre-made entrée salads, fruit cups, vegetable medleys ready to grill, etc. Non-food value-added agricultural products include: garlic braids, grapevine wreaths, willow baskets, wheat straw weavings, sheep and goat milk soaps, wool mulch, etc.

Brand Your Products: your brand is the name or symbol that represents your product(s). Having a well-known brand associated with a quality product constitutes a valuable asset and a marketing advantage for any firm. You can create a unique “brand image” for your product(s)

that will help you differentiate them from your competitors' products. A brand image is developed through perceptions of the product's benefits and services, the packaging, and the promotion program. Branding is extensively and successfully used with organic produce. Branded items will usually command a higher price than generic commodities.

Capitalize on Packaging: at retail the package is what sells the product and distinguishes it from competitors' offers. Use your creativity in designing your packaging. Pay attention to product presentation on the shelf/display. Consider the type and size of containers (product characteristics, usage, retail price, etc.), Federal laws, product safety, weight, fragility, tamper proofing, etc. Use clever designs and identify new ways to package your products - this allows for repositioning existing products.

Use Powerful Names: select powerful names for your firm's products - they are key to consumer recognition and recall! However, keep in mind that the name should suggest the product's benefits and fit the brand image, it should also be easy to pronounce and recognize and, very importantly, it should not be any name previously registered by another company.

5. Guidelines, Action Plans and Regulations that Apply to Food Products in the U.S.

Food safety is of utmost importance to your firm, the government and consumers. Both Federal and state agencies are active in the food safety arena. To ensure the safety of consumers and help food producers in keeping their food safe, an array of guidelines, action plans and regulations have been developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Food ad Drug Administration and the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN). The most relevant information includes: Good Agricultural Practices, Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP), the Produce Safety Action Plan, Labeling of Food Products, the Universal Product Code (UPC), Country of Origin Labeling and the Bioterrorism Act. Be aware that regulations might apply at the state and/or Federal level and make sure to check which apply to your products. A brief description of each with references to sources for additional information follows.

5.1 GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices)

The core of Good Agricultural Practices is proper sanitation at all points along the production and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. In October of 1998, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration issued the "Guidance for Industry: Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables." It is a science-based guide (not a regulation), which addresses microbial food safety hazards and good agricultural and management practices related to the growing, harvesting, washing, sorting, packaging and transporting of most fruits and vegetables sold to consumers in an unprocessed or minimally processed (raw) form.

In February of 2008, these same agencies issued the "Guidance for Industry: Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards of Fresh-cut Fruits and Vegetables." It covers fruits and vegetables that have been minimally processed (not subjected to a lethal kill step) by peeling,

slicing, chopping, shredding, coring, or trimming, with or without washing or other treatment, before being packaged for sale. Further information is available on the Food and Drug Administration website at: http://www.fda.gov (search for Good Agricultural Practices) or look up the website link provided in Supplement No. 1, at the end of this first part.

5.2 The 2004 Produce Safety Action Plan

On October 2004 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration released its final 2004 Produce Safety Action Plan titled "Produce Safety from Production to Consumption: 2004 Action Plan to Minimize Foodborne Illness Associated with Fresh Produce Consumption." The action plan is designed to target microbial food safety hazards (such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites) in or on produce consumed in the U.S., whether produced in the U.S. or abroad. The goal is to minimize the incidence of foodborne illnesses associated with the consumption of produce. It has four main objectives: 1) to prevent contamination of fresh produce with pathogens; 2) to minimize the public health impact when contamination of fresh produce occurs; 3) to improve communication with producers, packers, processors, transporters, distributors, preparers, consumers and other government entities about fresh produce; and 4) to facilitate and support research relevant to the contamination of fresh produce. The Action Plan identifies steps that could contribute to the accomplishment of each of these objectives. The full text of this Action Plan is available from the Food and Drug Administration website at: http://www.fda.gov (search for 2004 Action Plan) or look up the website link provided in Supplement No.1, at the end of this first part.

5.3 Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP)

"HACCP is a management system in which food safety is addressed through the analysis and control of biological, chemical, and physical hazards from raw material production, procurement and handling, to manufacturing, distribution and consumption of the finished product. HACCP is viewed as an effective and rational system of assuring food safety from harvest to consumption. It is based on the following seven basic principles: 1) conducting a hazard analysis; 2) determining the critical control points (CCPs); 3) establishing critical limits; 4) establishing monitoring procedures; 5) establishing corrective actions; 6) establishing verification procedures; and 7) establishing record-keeping and documentation procedures. Under the HACCP system, if a deviation occurs (indicating a loss of control), the appropriate steps are taken to reestablish control in a timely manner in order to assure that potentially hazardous products don't reach consumers. Additional information available at: http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/HACCP/default.htm or through the link provided in Supplement No.1, at the end of this first part.

5.4 Labeling of Food Products

Food labeling is required for most prepared foods (e.g. breads, cereals, canned and frozen foods, snacks, desserts, drinks, etc.) and should include: product identity, net contents, ingredients list, nutrition labeling, and name and address of manufacturer, packer or distributor. Nutritional labeling for raw produce (fruits and vegetables) and fish is voluntary. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for assuring that foods sold in the United States are safe, wholesome and properly labeled. This applies to domestically produced foods as well as to imports. The Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (FD&C Act) and the Fair Packaging and

Labeling Act are the Federal laws governing foods under FDA jurisdiction. It is important to know that even though final regulations are in place, they are frequently changed and it is the responsibility of the industry to stay current with these requirements. Every new regulation is published in the Federal Register (FR) before the date they come into effect and are compiled annually in Title 21 of the Code of Federal Regulation (CFR).

Small businesses may qualify for an exemption of the labeling regulations in processed foods. However, if any nutrient content claim (e.g. "sugar free") or health claim is made, this exemption is not applicable. Title 21 of the Code of Federal Regulations (21 CFR) 101.9(j)(1) and 21 CFR 101.9(j)(18) outline the requirements for a small business nutrition labeling exemption for foods. For the most part, exemptions have to be requested by filing the corresponding documentation, so it is key to read the terms under which such exemptions are granted. For more information visit the FDA's website at
http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/LabelingNutrition/default.htm
or look up the website link provided in Supplement No.1, at the end of this first part.

5.5 Universal Product Code (UPC)

Every product sold through retail stores has to have a UPC code on the label to allow for its automatic identification. Today, brokers, wholesalers and retail buyers will not handle a product without it. A UPC code is a 12-Digit Bar Code Pattern, the first portion of which is comprised of the manufacturer's number, assigned by the Uniform Code Council. The next portion, up to the 11th digit, identifies the product. The last digit is a computer generated check digit. The check digit is calculated by a formula of adding and multiplying the previous 11 digits. The fee for a UPC assignment is based on the size of the firm requesting it. The Uniform Code Council (UCC) merged with EAN International (for codes outside of the US) to form the Global Systems One or GS1, the single organization in the world from which all legitimate UPC and EAN numbers (now known as GTIN-12 and GTIN-13, respectively) have to originate. On June 7th, 2005 the UCC became the official GS1 member organization for the United States of America under the new name of GS1 US. For more information and/or for a UPC assignment, contact GS1at:

GS1 US
7887 Washington Village Drive, Suite 300
Dayton, OH 45459
Phone: 937-435-3870
Fax: 937-435-7317
e-mail: info@gs1us.org
http://www.gs1us.org/ and
http://www.upccode.net/upc-guide/uniform-code-council.html.

5.6 The Country of Origin (COOL) Law

COOL is a labeling law that requires retailers to provide their customers with information about the source of meats (beef, veal, pork, lamb, goat, chicken, wild and farm-raised fish and seafood, fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables, nuts (peanuts, pecans and macadamia nuts) and ginseng.

It was signed into law on May 13, 2002 by President Bush and the final rule for all covered commodities (as registered in the Code of Federal Regulations - 7CFR Part 60 and Part 65) went into effect on March 16, 2009. The Agricultural marketing Service (AMS) is responsible for its administration and enforcement. More information available at http://www.ams.usda.gov (search for Country of Origin Labeling), or look up the website link provided in Supplement No. 1, at the end of this document.

5.7 The Bioterrorism Act

The events occurred on September 11, 2001 reinforced the need to enhance the security of the United States. Congress responded by passing the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Act of 2002 (the Bioterrorism Act), which President Bush signed into law in June 12, 2002. Primarily designed "to protect the U.S. human food and animal feed supply in the event of credible threats of serious adverse health consequences or death to humans or animals," it encompasses four rules: 1) all domestic and foreign facilities that manufacture, process, pack or hold food that will be consumed in the U.S. must register with the FDA; 2) prior notification to FDA of all food imported or offered for import into the U.S. regardless of whether it will be consumed in the U.S.; 3) administrative detention of suspect food and 4) establishment and maintenance of records to allow for the identification of the immediate previous sources and immediate subsequent recipients of food, to help FDA track food implicated in future emergencies. On December 2004 FDA issued the final rule on the establishment and maintenance of records to complement three other previously issued rules. Additional information is available on the Food and Drug Administration website at: http://www.fda.gov/oc/bioterrorism/bioact.html. Also, see the website link provided in Supplement No. 1, at the end of this first part.

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