I. Introduction

The United States market presents many opportunities for the Canadian agri-food producer/processor. As our largest trading partner, closely linked to Canada by geographic and cultural ties, it is often the first export market for the new exporter.

This guide has been prepared by the United States Trade, Tourism and Investment Development Bureau of External Affairs and Inter-national Trade Canada (EAITC) to assist Canadian agri-food exporters to the United States. It is designed to provide general information for the novice Canadian agri-food exporter as well as contacts for additional information.

EAITC and other Federal/Provincial government departments are useful resources for the agri-food exporter and are committed to providing continued support for the Canadian business community in their export development efforts.

Canada and the United States are each other's closest neighbours and most important trading partners. The two countries share over 4000 kilometres of border, similar culture and similar language, which makes it tempting to think of the U.S. as an extension of the domestic market. While many shippers are successful using this frame of reference, it is better to remember that the U.S. is a foreign country and its market is not identical to Canada's.

In fact, it may be best to think of it not as one national market but several regional ones, each having its own requirements. Proximity to some of these regions may offer Canadian exporters an advantage over U.S. competitors who are situated a greater distance away. At the same time, however, it may be that the best market is not the closest one. Each should be assessed independently by the Canadian exporter.

Canadian businessmen venturing into the U.S. market are likely to encounter two different attitudes. Either the customer will feel, as many Canadians do, that we are not foreign to each other, in which case selling may be straightforward; or the customer will consider Canadians unlikely to be able to meet their more rigid standards and deadlines. In this case, a trial shipment may yield the best result.

Canadians will likely find that the pace of business is faster and the competition more intense in the U.S. than it is in the Canadian domestic market. It may take more effort to become established and may require more attention to customers (such as frequent sales calls) to remain ahead of the competition in such an atmosphere. U.S. buyers generally prefer prices to be quoted on a delivered basis with all costs included; and there is a tendency to minimize inventories, so frequent deliveries may be needed, (the "just in time" philosophy).

As a general rule, when new to exporting to the U.S., it is advisable to deal through brokers or manufacturers' representatives. Exporters are urged to have price lists in U.S. dollars and should be aware of the provisions of U.S. laws that cover labelling and importation of food and beverages.

Best of luck in your exporting activities.