The main buying power in the processed food sector has gravitated to the southeast of England. Synonymous with this is the growth of the "private label" in the chains. Some chains practice a "Buy British" policy whereas others buy from the most competitive source — domestic and overseas.

The distributive chain to the smaller buyers (i.e. voluntary chains, individual grocers, and department store food halls) is generally via wholesale merchants with warehouse and transport facilities. Smaller processors also utilize this part of the network and a primary function of the wholesale merchants is to "bulk up" a miscellany of the smaller more specialty lines for delivery to the central depots of the food chains. In the specialty foods sector, there is a distribution network which accommodates smaller than normal deliveries, albeit contributing to increased costs.

Importer/agents generally provide an across-the-board service to an overseas exporter. Only in rare exceptions does a major food chain directly involve itself in importing.

Table 11
Principal Canadian Processed Food Exports to the U.K., 1981-83