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Perishable Specialist keeps berry imports moving

By LORA ABCARIAN

The imported berry season is underway, and Frank Ramos, president and chief executive officer of The Perishable Specialist Inc., used a few choice words to sum up the company's activities.

"This is the time of year when people are shooting on all cylinders," he told *The Pro-*

duce News in early September. Peak activity will continue through November.

The company is licensed as a customs broker by the Department of Homeland Security's Customs & Border Protection division. PSI is headquartered in Doral, FL, situated in the heart of Miami International Airport. As a remote location filer, PSI clears

cargo at all ports in the United States.

Mr. Ramos's wife, Ana, serves as the company's chief financial officer, and the couple

provides its clients with 37 years of specialized experience. PSI works with importers that bring in product both by air and cargo container. The company obtains U.S. Department of Agriculture pre-clearances for commodities at the port of origin and facilitates cargo release once product has arrived on U.S. soil. Emphasis on pre-clearance enables product to move efficiently upon arrival, sometimes in as little as three to four hours.

"Our mentality is 24/7," Mr. Ramos said in an earlier interview. "We do whatever it takes. Our customer is the importer. We bridge the exporter, importer and freight forwarder as one team."

PSI also provides its customers with logistics services, thus ensuring shipments arrive at their final destinations in the most cost-effective manner.

The first shipments of Argentina blueberries arrived in the United States Sept. 15. "Weather was a little cool, but we didn't have any hailstorms," Mr. Ramos said. "We're expecting a great season out of Argentina." Comments from PSI's customers have been upbeat when it comes to blueberry quality and volume. "When Argentina finishes, we segue to Chile," he added.

PSI also works with importers bringing blackberries in from Guatemala. "Right now, we are in peak. Quality is great, and volume is fantastic," Mr. Ramos went on to say.

Feedback from the com-

pany's customers is upbeat. "They are predicting a minimum of a 10 percent increase for blackberries and blueberries," he said.

A small volume of raspberries is imported from Chile. "It's a small window," Mr. Ramos said. "It's a premium [product]." Raspberry imports begin in December.

Detail and attention to importers' needs is paramount at PSI. "Service is the only product we sell," Mr. Ramos said. "We strive to visit all countries prior to the upcoming season in order to gain a better understanding of the importer's and exporter's needs. It's the importer's job to sell his product. He shouldn't have to worry about the importation process. We have seen every aspect and gamut of the process."

At the present time, Mr. Ramos said the Customs & Border Protection division is conducting a pilot program using MobiKEY. The portable identity validation device securely connects users to a variety of services from Internet-enabled computers with its USB interface. Using MobiKEY, inspectors can store information about cargos and clearances and transmit the data remotely at airports and ports.

The net result, said Mr. Ramos, is that import operations from port of origin to port of entry will be streamlined when the program is fully launched.

"This is going to be fantastic," he said of the technology's benefits to importers.



Frank Ramos in Guatemala looking at blackberries. (Photos courtesy of The Perishable Specialist Inc.)



Frank and Ana Ramos, owners of The Perishable Specialist Inc., visited Guatemala this past March to view blackberry operations for their clients. The personal visits give them the opportunity to learn more about the needs of both importers and exporters.