

AMERICA FRUIT

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Miami: gateway to the Americas

City's fresh produce firms forge new ties with
Latin American growers

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THE PERISHABLE SPECIALIST INC.

In spite of all the efforts by foreign-based producers to grow quality fruits and vegetables for the North American market, all can be undone if there are



Perishable Specialist: Frank Ramos

significant delays clearing product at the border.

Without the services of customs brokers competent in untangling red tape and well versed in the nuances of handling perishables, exporters and importers alike would be at the mercy of a government bureaucracy dedicated to combating bio-terrorism and less so to the needs of preserving product shelf-life.

As the name on the door implies, Frank Ramos' company specializes in prompt and expert clearance of imported fresh fruits and vegetables and other perishable commodities into the US. Located within blocks of Miami International Airport, The Perishable Specialist Inc. (PSI) is a family-owned business that prides itself on customer service.

"My wife, Anna, works alongside me here at our Miami office," says Mr Ramos. "We consider PSI to be the

doesn't matter whether the customer is large or small, they're still able to talk with us personally if there's a need. We're a 24-hour-a-day operation, because the airport never closes."

Mr Ramos has seen the customs brokerage and clearance business become dramatically more intricate since 9/11.

"There have been more changes within the industry since 9/11 than occurred over the previous 20 years," he claims. "It took a lot of effort, but once we were able to digest all the new rules and regulations, we welcomed it. The post 9/11 environment has also served to weed out all those service providers who couldn't compete. It's made our end of the industry even more professional."

Without the technical advances in data processing over the last decade, however, Mr Ramos readily admits that customs brokerages throughout the nation would have been overwhelmed with today's information management requirements.

"As a customs broker, we're on the frontline of the perishables industry," he tells *Americafruit Magazine*. "If something goes wrong, we're likely to be one of the first to know about it so we've become experts at solving problems. That's why I like to visit my customers' operations to better understand what their needs and challenges are. It allows us to do a better job for them in clearing their product."

Mr Ramos related an example of a recent incident where PSI's skill at problem solving proved critical to the prompt clearance of a perishable shipment for one of its key clients.

"The Bio-Terrorism Act requires that all exporters be registered in advance with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)," he explains. "One of our customer's shipments had arrived in Miami, but for some reason the FDA was asking for proof of their registration and they couldn't find a copy. They called us in a panic and we were able to solve the problem because we had their registration on file here in our office, since we keep hard copies of all documents for seven years. We feel it is our job to be organized on behalf of our customers."

Mr Ramos got his start in perishables customs clearance running documents for another brokerage firm in Miami.

"I fell in love with the industry," he says. "I worked my way up to shift manager and eventually went out on my own. I've become successful in this

business because I love what I do. In addition to air transport, PSI also increasingly works with ocean shipments, due to advances in technology that prolong shelf-life and allow for longer transit times. Mr Ramos cites controlled atmosphere applications for blueberries as an example.

PSI works closely with a nearby state-of-the-art coldstorage facility for staging customer shipments, arranging refrigerated trucking for product delivery as required.