

Customs broker rolled with changes

BY BRIAN GAYLORD

Doral, FL-based customs brokerage The Perishable Specialist Inc. has undergone considerable changes since the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in September 2001.

Frank Ramos, founder of the Perishable Specialist Inc., said that the most pronounced changes in importing fresh produce — and any product — in recent times came in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. The Food & Drug Administration implemented registration for importers and shippers with a focus on traceback measures. The first phase of FDA's campaign was one of education. The second phase involved enforcement of FDA's traceback requirements, and the third phase involved full compliance and penalties for noncompliance.

Mr. Ramos said that he welcomed the increased regulation. "It was like a cleansing," Mr. Ramos said. "The not-so-worthy customs brokers fell by the wayside."

Another change following the terrorist attacks was one of prior notification for shipments. Now FDA and Customs officials have to be alerted a minimum of four hours prior to arrival of any shipment.

The Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism also was created in the terrorism aftermath. C-TPAT includes background checks on personnel. For The Perishable Specialist, traceback capability carries through to every step of the operation.

The Perishable Specialist has been certified through the program and is licensed by U.S. Customs Service, which oversees C-TPAT.