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Exporter Guide

Annual

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Report Highlights:

The economic situation in the Dominican Republic is very stable, and it has a promising outlook. The free trade agreement between the United States and the DR (DR-CAFTA), which is about to start, will provide significant new openings for a wide range of products, as tariffs are lowered and non-tariff barriers on meat and dairy products are removed. The government eliminated the 13% exchange tax, which was contributing to increased prices of imported products. Exports from the United States are expected to grow by at least 19% by the end of 2006. Traditional importers continue to look for new products in the United States with potential for the Dominican market.

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Annual Report
Santo Domingo [DR1]
[DR]

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DISCLAIMER: the Office of Agricultural Affairs of the United States Department of Agriculture in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic prepared this report for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care was taken in the preparation of this report, information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation, or because clear and consistent information about these policies was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with their foreign customers, who are normally best equipped to research such matters with local authorities, before any goods are shipped.

FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE IMPORTING COUNTRY'S RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY BORDER OFFICIALS AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.

EXPORTER GUIDE TO THE CONSUMER FOOD MARKET IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

I. MARKET OVERVIEW

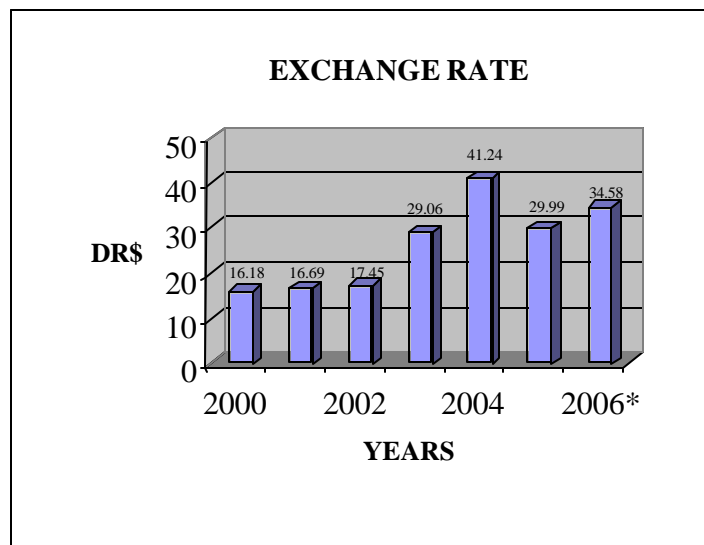
A. Current Economic Situation

The economic situation in the Dominican Republic is very stable, and it has a promising outlook. The Fernandez administration, which took power in August 2004, launched an economic adjustment and stabilization program aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, a program that was renewed in late January 2005 with the signing of a standby agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This program has imposed stringent adjustments, especially in public finance and the banking sector, the main sources of the imbalances that undermined stability and encouraged the outflow of capital in recent years.

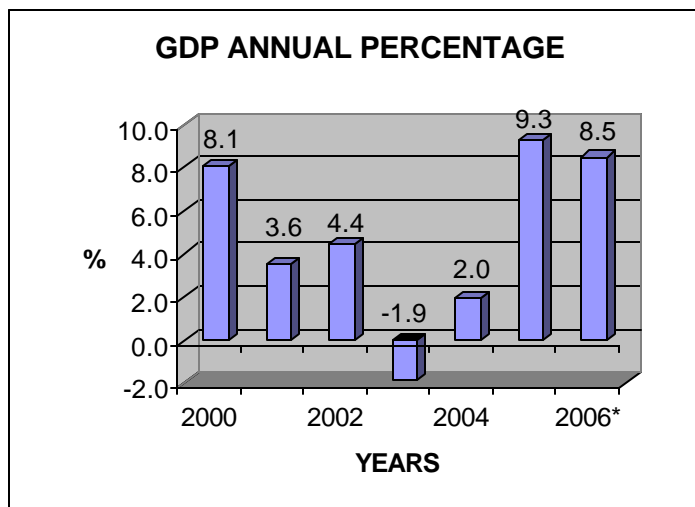
According to the Economist Intelligence Unit Country Report 2006, the government's main challenges for years 2007 and 2008 will be: to consolidate the stabilization process, to enhance fiscal management, to strengthen the financial system, and to address a crisis in the electricity sector.

The entry of DR-CAFTA has been delayed until Congress approves new intellectual property rights and public procurement legislation-the deal is expected to come into force by year-end or early 2007. Policy will continue to be guided by the 28-month stand-by arrangement with the IMF that expires in July 2007, but experts expect it to continue for another year.

Currently, the exchange rate of the Dominican peso is quite stable ranging between DR\$31.00 and DR\$34.00 to US\$1.00. The forecast is that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow by 8.5% by the end of 2006 and by an average of 4.5% for 2007 and 2008. Inflation is returning to single digit levels. At the end of 2006, inflation is expected to be 6.7. For 2007 and 2008, it is expected to be 6.5% and 6.2%, respectively.

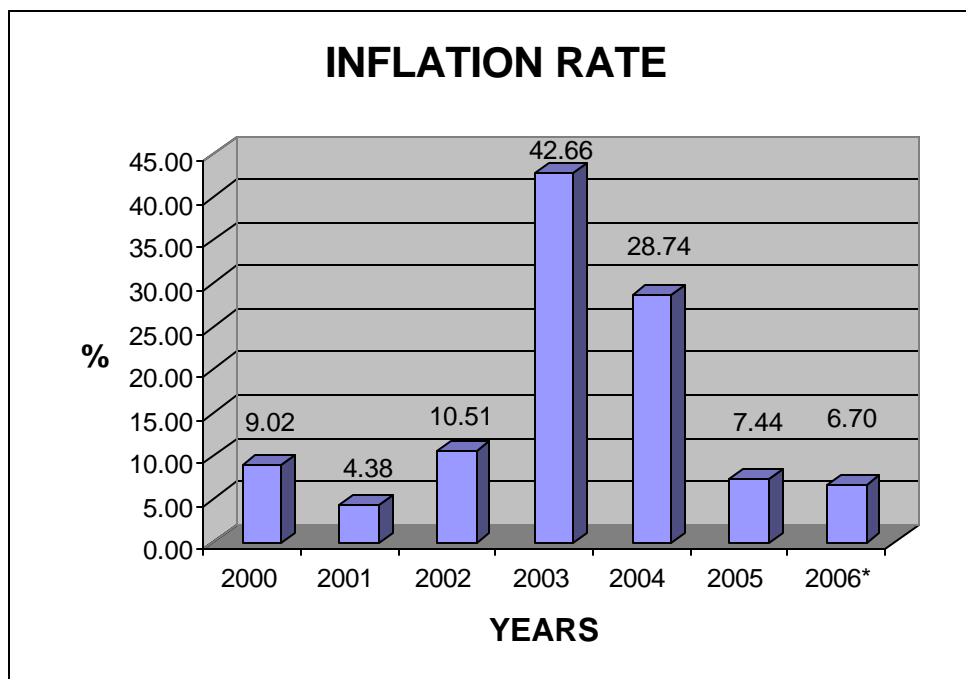


Source: Central Bank of the Dominican Republic and IMF Estimates*



Source: Central Bank of the Dominican Republic and The Economist Intelligence Unit.

* The Economist Intelligence Unit's Estimates



Source: Central Bank of the Dominican Republic and The Economist Intelligence Unit
 * The Economist Intelligence Unit's Estimates April

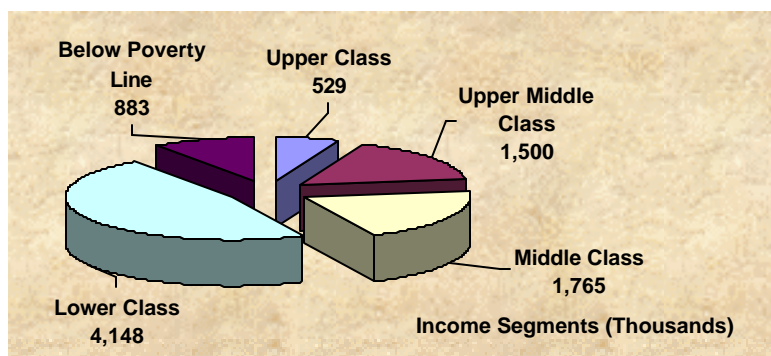
B. Demographics and income Distribution

Based on the 2002 census, which was the latest one, developed by the National Statistics Office, the Dominican population was estimated at 8.6 million in 2004, with 63% of the population (5.5 million) living in urban areas. It was also estimated that the population of the Dominican Republic grows at a rate of 1.3% per year. With that growth rate, at the end of this year 2006, the population is estimated to be 8.8 million people.

Income distribution is one of the major constraints that affect the development of the Dominican Republic. The poorest half of the population receives less than one-fifth of the GNP, while the richest 10% receives nearly 40%. Income distribution is heavily skewed toward the upper class and upper middle class. This means that a significant portion of the population does not have an income level to purchase relatively expensive imported food products. However, consumers in or above the middle class, a total of 3.8 million people, shop regularly at supermarkets, eat in restaurants, and vacation in resorts. In this segment of the population are the potential customers for U.S. exporters. Luxury goods can only be targeted at the upper and upper middle class, with a total population of about 2 million people.

- Upper Class: around 6 percent of the population. These families and individuals are conspicuous consumers and have an income level that makes almost any product or service accessible.
- Upper Middle Class: this segment is about 17% of the population. It has an income level that makes expenditures on food products relatively insignificant as a portion of their overall income.

- Middle Class: about 20% of the population. This class can afford most imported food products, but it must watch budget overall expenditures on food.
- Lower Class: about 47% of the population. This class lives at a subsistence level and consume mostly basic foods.
- Below Poverty Level: around 10% of the population.



Source: National Statistics Office (ONE), 2004.

Internal migration toward the city of Santo Domingo has been constant over the past decade. With approximately 31% (2.7 million) of the total population, the city of Santo Domingo-the National District and the Santo Domingo province-and its surrounding suburbs have the biggest concentrated market in the country. Santiago is the second largest market with 908,250 people. Other important cities are San Pedro de Macoris, La Romana, La Vega, Bonao, San Francisco de Macoris and Higüey. The construction of new highways, seaports, and airports in recent years and the well-developed telecommunications infrastructure allow smooth distribution of products throughout the country.

C. Market Size

The Dominican Republic is the third largest market for U.S. agricultural, fish, and forestry products in the Western Hemisphere, behind Mexico and Canada. Based on the BICO report data, exports of these products from the United States in 2005 were about 570 million. Considering the trend for the first eight months of 2006, we expect these exports to increase by 19% by the end of the year.

Most of the growth in U.S. exports of agricultural, fish, and forestry products to the region in recent years has been in consumer-oriented products. Data from the United Nations database show that about 35% of consumer-oriented products exported to the Dominican Republic is from the United States. This source also shows that in 2004, world exports of consumer-oriented products to the Dominican Republic were \$226 million, and \$75 million were from the United States. In 2005, these exports from the United States increase to 98 million, and we expect them to grow by over 11% by the end of 2006.

According to statistics provided by the Central Bank, the total demand for food and beverages is estimated at about US\$2 billion, with an average growth rate of six percent per year. It is also estimated that about 40 percent of all food and beverages consumed in the country is imported.

D. Advantages and Challenges in the Market

Advantages	Challenges
1. Food distribution channels are becoming more efficient, facilitating the introduction of new products.	1. Globalization has allowed other regions, such as Europe and South America to expand sales into what has traditionally been a U.S. dominated market.
2. Dominicans are greatly influenced by American culture and have a positive perception of U.S. products.	2. New economic problems could reduce the demand for imported food products.
3. The tourism sector is large and growing, increasing the demand for high quality food products.	3. The local Dominican food industry is becoming more efficient and more competitive, as it integrates new technologies into its production processes.
4. The DR-CAFTA, when it commences, will improve access for many US food products.	4. Even before implementing the DR-CAFTA, the Dominican Republic is negotiating free trade agreements with other countries, such as the European Union and Taiwan.
5. The opportunities that the DR-CAFTA will bring about may increase the number of new Dominican importers in the market.	5. Tariff rate quotas to protect local producers restrict imports of some products like meat, dairy products, beans, rice, and poultry.
6. Consumers are demanding higher quality and healthier products, and they perceived U.S. products to meets their new requirments.	6. Sanitary and phytosanitary import permits are used as a non-tariff barrier to limit imports of meat and dairy products.

II. EXPORTER'S BUSINESS TIPS

A. Business Customs

Personal relationships are a key factor for doing business in the Dominican Republic. Business executives value personal contacts with suppliers. Many people may not want to do business with someone considered rude or disrespectful. A common courtesy is to give a warm handshake combined with a conversation about the person's well-being and his family prior to starting the business-related conversation. Dominicans are extremely friendly and tend to prefer to develop a personal relationship before going into a business relationship. This relationship helps Dominican business people develop more confidence before making any business commitment.

There are several ways for U.S. exporters to enter the Dominican market. They can use locally appointed distributors, a wholly owned subsidiary, joint venture partners, or

Dominican importers and wholesalers who also own retail outlets. We advise that U.S. suppliers have a local representative or distributor in the Dominican. However, exporters need to know that Law 173 seeks to protect local agents from the unjust termination of their agreements by their foreign principals. This law has a wide scope of application, which includes any type of agency, representation, distribution, license, concession, franchise, or other agreement relating to products manufactured abroad or in the country. Some experienced exporters have found that the protection this law offers to local business people may be restrictive for U.S. suppliers.

B. Consumer Taste

Dominicans have adopted much of the U.S. culture, such as music, sports, and fashion. The food consumption trend in the Dominican is similar the trend in the United States, although we can estimate a lag of ten to fifteen years. But we can be sure that what is demanded in the United States will be demanded in the Dominican Republic in the future. Because of the globalization of the world economy, the lag is eventually shortening.

Dominican consumers have the idea that products made in more developed countries, such as the United States, are more reliable in terms of quality and safety. There is also a tendency, mainly among middle and high-income classes, to consume natural and healthy products. These consumers are demanding food with less saturated fat, cholesterol, and sugar.

C. Food Standards and Regulations

1. Import Procedures & Product Registration

In general, U.S. food and beverage products have good access to the Dominican market. Some of the exceptions are sugar, pork, poultry, beef, beans, onions, dairy products, garlic, and rice, which need import permits or **"no objection certificates"** that sometimes are difficult to obtain. The Dominican Ministry of Agriculture controls imports of those products through a restrictive licensing system to protect local production. There is a significant market potential for these products, which serve a very distinct market segment.

Consumer goods must be registered with the Ministry of Public Health (SESPAS), which issues a certificate (Sanitation Registration) that must be printed on the label of the product. The supporting documents needed to register a food product are the following:

- U.S. certificate of free sale
- Certificate of origin
- Label indicating the qualitative and quantitative formulation
- A copy of the letter of assignment or contract with a local agent (if one exists for the product);
- Registration fees and product samples.
- All foreign documents should be legalized at the nearest Dominican consulate. It takes approximately nine months to process the Sanitation Registration. The cost of this registration may vary depending on the product.

The trademark must also be registered through the National Office of Intellectual Property of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. It used to take three months to register, but now the process, they said, was reduced to only twenty-four hours. It is advisable to contract the services of a local legal firm to handle these processes.

Exporters need the following documents for shipments to the Dominican Republic that exceed the value of US\$100.00

- Bill of Lading (English or Spanish)
- Commercial Invoice
- Insurance Certificate (issued by a local insurance company)
- A certificate from the Central Bank (Import permit) and/or a No Objection Certificate issued by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Depending on the type of products, exporters may need some other documents, such as:

- Phyto or Zoo Sanitary Certificate: for importing agricultural and animal products, such as fresh dried fruits, vegetables, plants and animals.
- Import Permit issued by the Department of Internal Taxes for alcoholic beverages.

The Phytoanitary Law (Law 4990 enacted on September 3, 1958) regulates the imports of plants, fruits, seeds, flowers and vegetables. Considering the sanitary situation of the country of origin, the Ministry of Agriculture may grant import permits when it deems that the import of said products is not harmful to plants and agriculture in the country. The Ministry also has the power to establish quarantines. Cattle imports, for example, are subject to rigorous quarantine measures. The importer is responsible for the cost of this process.

Currently, the Dominican Republic allows only boneless beef from animals under thirty months from the United States. The Animal Plant and Health Inspection Services (APHIS) requires its inspectors to check that beef to be exported to the Dominican Republic meets all the requirements. If it does not meet all the requirements, the inspectors will not issue the required certificate.

For further information on those requirements, please refer to the FSIS web page at www.fsis.usda.gov/Regulations_&_Policies/Dominican_Republic_Requirements/index.asp.

There is also a new protocol to export live swine from the United States to the Dominican Republic. For further information, on this protocol, please refer to the APHIS web page at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ncie/iregs/animals/dr_swine_1006.pdf

2. Custom Clearance

The custom clearance process in the Dominican Republic is not transparent. Some of the problems exporters and importers may encounter include non-acceptance of commercial invoices as a basis for customs valuation and poor port organization and management. When the process goes smoothly, it may take approximately seven days, if all the required documentation has been submitted. This requires the hiring of a customs agent who must be knowledgeable, and, in some cases, who knows the officials involved in the processes for appraising, verifying, and clearing the merchandise. After fifteen days in port, shipping lines assess a daily charge for the use of containers. Port authorities also charge for the use of the space.

The officials are supposed to appraise the value of the imported merchandise based on the invoice price or a custom's appraisal list (Lista de Valuación Aduanera, LVA). If inspectors find out that the actual invoice price was changed, the importer will be fined. Recently, officials are basing their appraisal mainly on the LVA.

All imported merchandise is subject to payment of tariffs and other taxes. Tariffs are estimated based on the C.I.F. value (cost, insurance and freight) in Dominican Pesos at the current exchange rate. Tariffs range from 0 to 40 percent for most products, depending on the level of processing and the national interest on the product. The World Trade Organization (WTO) approved a technical rectification to allow the country to impose tariff rate quotas on several agricultural products mentioned at the beginning of this section. Imports exceeding the limits are subject to tariffs ranging from 74 percent and 162 percent.

Other taxes include:

- A value-added tax (Impuesto de Transferencia de Bienes Industrializados y Servicios, ITBIS): 16 percent on the added value. This tax also applies to local production; however, local products considered to be staples are exempt. In some cases, this represents an advantage for local products.
- Luxury Tax (Impuesto Selectivo al Consumo, ISC): ranges from 5 to 80 percent of the C.I.F. value of imports. It is applied to products that are considered luxury goods, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco and caviar. This applies on the retail price and, to calculate it, the C.I.F. value is multiplied by a factor, which is determined by the Customs Department in an administrative manner.

Recently, the government eliminated the the following taxes and/or requirements:

- Exchange Commission (Import Permit), which was 13% of the C.I.F. value of the imported products.
- Consular Invoice and the legal taxes (between US\$100 and US\$200 dollars): paid in the country of origin.

3. Labeling Regulation

According to the Department of Norms and Standards (DIGENOR), all products must be properly labeled. Products packaged in the presence of the final consumer or packaged in the stores for sale on the same day are exempted from this requirement.

Labeling regulations require that all labels must provide the following information:

- All labels must be written in Spanish. A complementary label or counter-label may be used when the original label is not written in Spanish.
- Company brand.
- Product named
- Product description.
- Net weight/volume.
- List of ingredientes and addittives indicating the amounts used.
- The name and address of the producer and importer.
- Product batch code.
- Sanitation registration number (from the Department of Health).
- The expiration date.
- Instructions for product use.

III. MARKET SECTOR STRUCTURE

A. Retail Food Sector

Consolidation has been the major trend of the Dominican Republic's distribution industry, and it is affecting all points on the traditional importer, wholesaler, and retail supply chain. An extended period of economic growth, with the exception of the financial crisis of 2003, has contributed with the evolution of the supermarket industry in urban and high-income areas. This has created pressure along the supply chain to provide value-added service and reduce intermediary costs.

Many of the large retail companies have vertically integrated import and distribution activities through their parent companies. Importer-distributors add value to their service by supplying a wide range of products. These distributors also supply other chains, and the converse happens as well, with supermarkets frequently purchasing goods from other distributors outside the parent group. Large importer-distributors frequently serve as exclusive agents for international brands.

The food distribution system has experienced substantial changes in recent years. Supermarkets are becoming more important at the expense of the traditional system of warehouses and mom 'n pop grocery stores. Foreign supermarket chains, such as PriceSmart from the United States and Carrefour from France, have retail outlets in Santo Domingo and Santiago. Local supermarket chains made extraordinary expansion efforts and adjustments to compete with foreign chains. They adopted modern technology for managing their operations and aggressive marketing strategies to attract new clients. Small local supermarkets are also designing strategies to compete with giants. At the end of 2001, the owners of a group of small supermarkets created an association to try to procure their products directly from suppliers and avoid going through local importers, assuring lower prices and gaining a competitive edge over large supermarkets.

The traditional retail food sector of the country is comprised of supermarkets (that targets middle and high income customers and also function as importers), warehouse owners (who supply the small grocery stores and also function as retailers) and the mom 'n pop stores, known as *Colmados*. The *Colmados* are scattered all over the country. Their customer base is mainly middle and low income customers, however, they also function as convenience stores in almost all neighborhood in urban areas.

Although mom 'n pop stores (*colmados*) distribute about 70 percent of food products, they carry a narrow selection of products and are not generally a target for new products from U.S. suppliers. However, there are many *colmados* associations that are trying to import products directly when the DR-CAFTA commences. Leader of those associations are now interested in attending trade shows in the United States to learn about new products available with potential for the Dominican market.

The supermarket industry has advanced a lot in the country during the last ten to twelve years. The stores of the major supermarket chains in the country are comparable to those of industrialized nations in various aspects, such as space, variety of products, operations technology, product layout, and aggressive marketing strategies. The number of supermarkets and other stores selling consumer products in the mass segments of Santo Domingo and other cities of the country is also increasing.

For more detailed information on this sector, please refer to the Retail Sector Report (DR6002) at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/scriptsw/AttacheRep/default.asp>, which provides more details on the development of the sector in the Dominican Republic.

B. Hotel, Restaurants and Institutions

The Dominican hotel, restaurant and institutional sector, which is one of the largest in the Caribbean, includes a diverse tourism sector, business hotels, upscale and more informal restaurants, and fast food franchises. Consumption of food and beverages in the Dominican Republic's (DR) non-tourist sector is estimated at over US\$700 million. Consumption at all-inclusive resorts is estimated at over US\$443.3 million, for a total of over US\$1 billion for the two sectors. However, the use of imported products in the institutional sector is limited, reducing the attractiveness of this segment to U.S. exporters.

As mentioned before, around 40 percent of the total food and beverage consumption in the country is imported and over 35% comes from the United States. However, it is important to note that the country's food processing industry is improving its efficiency and competitiveness. This means competition from domestic products will likely grow.

There are several trends in the HRI sector that bode well for future demand for imported food products. Over 40 percent of women have now joined the workforce and the percentage will continue to grow. This results in higher demand for meals outside the home and more convenience in retail food products. An increase in the number of Dominicans taking vacations in country is pushing up food consumption in the HRI sector.

Increasing menu diversification, as Dominicans internationalize their consumption habits, is also increasing the demand for imported products in the sector. Fast food is well established in the market, and there is an increase in the consumption of pizzas, hamburgers, and other types of fast food.

Sub-sector profiles within the HRI Sector

Resorts

The resort/hotel sector is the largest in the Caribbean region. It has over 100 hotels with almost 60,000 rooms. The Dominican Republic is receiving increasing worldwide recognition as a premier vacation destination, which has made it an attractive venue for fairs, conferences, conventions and international events. These factors contribute to an increasing flow of business people to the country.

Almost all the hotels located outside the city of Santo Domingo are all-inclusive resorts. Most of them are located in the northern and eastern side of the country. Some of the hotel chains in the country import part of the food products and food ingredients used, or at least buy them from local importers-distributors.

Business Hotels

Most of the business hotels are located in Santo Domingo, the capital city. They are basically business hotels, but tourists interested in the Colonial City and other tourist attractions in Santo Domingo use them. Most of them belong to large worldwide hotel chains. Including all-inclusive resorts, the total number of new hotel rooms by the end of 2006 was estimated at over 9,000.

Restaurants

Santo Domingo has an extensive up-scale restaurant sector, which caters to the wealthier classes, businesses, and tourists. All of them have international menus and individual specialties. Ethnic restaurants include German, Arabic, Argentine, Spanish, French, Italian, Mediterranean, Mexican and Chinese.

Restaurants offer good opportunities for exporters from the United States. To meet the needs for international dishes, they import beef, fish and seafood, pasta, and hams. Since these restaurants do not function as chains and purchases are small, they buy almost all products needed through importer/distributors.

The general trend towards eating out has led to the opening of many small restaurants focusing on the lunch crowd, independent cafeterias, cafeterias located inside businesses, and cafeterias in supermarkets. These establishments provide local food, sandwiches, and snacks at affordable prices to working-class Dominicans.

Fast Food

Fast food restaurants are the fastest growing sector in the food service industry. Foreign fast food chains, mostly from the United States, started in the Dominican Republic in 1994 and have been very well received by Dominicans. Over 48 of these establishments have been opened, mostly in Santo Domingo and Santiago. The entry of foreign fast food chains has spurred the development of local businesses, although they tend to specialize in local popular foods. Many of them import their own products, primarily in the case of hamburger, meats, chickens, potatoes, sauces and ice cream. Fresh vegetables and bread are procured domestically.

Institutions

Many large businesses have set up cafeterias in order to offer food to their employees. These are independently run. Some free trade zones and industrial parks have also begun to install cafeterias, with the objective of offering inexpensive food of an acceptable quality. These cafeterias are more oriented to serving traditional dishes, with over 90 percent of ingredients being produced domestically. In this category there is limited opportunity for U.S. exporters, except for basic items and condiments offered at cut-rate prices. The handling of food in prisons and public hospitals has not been privatized and most inputs are sourced domestically.

IV. BEST PRODUCTS PROSPECTS

Dominican importers and consumers have shown high interests in the following products:

U.S. EXPORTS TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC (THOUSAND OF DOLLARS)	
PRODUCT	2005
1. Dairy Products	18,540
2. Red Meats, Fresh/Chilled/Frozen	11,047
3. Fresh Fruit	9,084
4. Snack Foods	8,814
5. Wine and Beer	4,601
6. Breakfast Cereals and pancake mix	3,533
7. Red Meats, Prepared/ Preserved	2,129
8. Low Carb and Light Foods	N/A

Source: FAS BICO Report

Products Not Present in Significant Quantities with Good Sales Potential

Usually, the Dominican Republic follows trends in the United States. Diet/healthy products, although not present in large quantities, are increasing in demand.

Products Not Present Because They Face Significant Barriers

Importers of meat and dairy products face some problems in obtaining sanitary and phytosanitary (no objection) import permits. Although these products are not subject to quotas, the import permit process is tightly controlled, making it difficult at times to bring in reliable supplies. In addition, imports for seven major agricultural categories (rice, sugar, garlic, poultry meat, beans, onions and powdered milk) are managed through import quotas.

V. KEY CONTACTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

For more further information, please refer to the HRI Sector Report (DR6011), the Retail Sector Report (DR6002), and the Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards (DR6014) at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/scriptsw/AttacheRep/default.asp>, which provides more details on those food sectors and import regulations in the Dominican Republic.

FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

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NATIONAL HOTEL AND RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION (ASONAHORES)

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Santo Domingo, D.R.
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Contacts: Ing. Luis López, President
Lic. Arturo Villanueva, Executive Vice-President
Email: asonahores@verizon.net.do

INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE SECRETARIAT, INDUSTRIAL PROPERTY OFFICE (ONAPI)

Ave. Los Proceres #11
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INVESTMENT AND PROMOTION CENTER [CENTRO DE PROMOCIÓN E INVERSIÓN DE LA REPUBLICA DOMINICANA (CEI-RD)]

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