

**Analysis of the
Draft Complaint and Proposed Decision Order
to Aid Public Comment**

I. Introduction

The Federal Trade Commission ("Commission") has accepted for public comment from Koninklijke Ahold NV, ("Ahold"), and Bruno's Supermarkets Inc., ("Bruno's") (collectively "the Proposed Respondents") an Agreement Containing Consent Orders ("the proposed consent order"). The Proposed Respondents have also reviewed a draft complaint contemplated by the Commission. The proposed consent order is designed to remedy likely anticompetitive effects arising from Ahold's proposed acquisition of all of the outstanding voting stock of Bruno's.

II. Description of the Parties and the Proposed Acquisition

Ahold is a global food service and food retailer headquartered in the Netherlands. The company operates or services approximately 8,500 stores in the United States, Europe, Latin America and Asia and had sales of over \$49 billion in 2000. In the United States, Ahold, through its U.S. subsidiary Ahold U.S.A., Inc., operates over 1,300 retail food stores, including supermarkets under the Giant, Stop & Shop, Tops and BI-LO trade names. In the southeastern United States, Ahold owns and operates 294 BI-LO supermarkets as well as a number of Golden Gallon convenience stores.

Bruno's, headquartered in Birmingham, is the largest supermarket chain in the state of Alabama. With annual sales in 2000 of over \$1.5 billion, Bruno's operates 169 supermarkets in Alabama (123), Georgia (25), Florida (16) and Mississippi (2) as well as 13 liquor stores and two gas stations. Bruno's operates supermarkets under the trade names Bruno's Fine Foods, Food World, FoodMax, Food Fair and Fresh Value.

On September 4, 2001, Ahold and Bruno's signed an agreement whereby Ahold will purchase all of the outstanding voting securities of Bruno's through the merger of New Bronco Acquisition Corp., an indirect wholly owned subsidiary of Ahold, with and into Bruno's Supermarkets. Bruno's Supermarkets will continue as the surviving corporation. The value of the transaction is approximately \$500 million.

III. The Draft Complaint

The draft complaint alleges that the relevant line of commerce (i.e., the product market) is the retail sale of food and grocery items in supermarkets. Supermarkets provide a distinct set of products and services for consumers who desire one-stop shopping for food and grocery products. Supermarkets carry a full line and wide selection of both food and nonfood products (typically more than 10,000

different stock-keeping units ("SKUs")), as well as an extensive inventory of those SKUs in a variety of brand names and sizes. In order to accommodate the large number of nonfood products necessary for one-stop shopping, supermarkets are large stores that typically have at least 10,000 square feet of selling space.

Supermarkets compete primarily with other supermarkets that provide one-stop shopping for food and grocery products. Supermarkets base their food and grocery prices primarily on the prices of food and grocery products sold at nearby supermarkets. Most consumers shopping for food and grocery products at supermarkets are not likely to shop elsewhere in response to a small price increase by supermarkets.

Retail stores other than supermarkets that sell food and grocery products, such as neighborhood "mom & pop" grocery stores, limited assortment stores, convenience stores, specialty food stores (e.g., seafood markets, bakeries, etc.), club stores, military commissaries, and mass merchants, do not effectively constrain prices at supermarkets. The retail format and variety of items sold at these other stores are significantly different from that of supermarkets. None of these other retailers offer a sufficient quantity and variety of products to enable consumers to one-stop shop for food and grocery products.

The draft complaint alleges that the relevant sections of the country (*i.e.*, the geographic markets) in which to analyze the acquisition are the areas in or near the towns of Milledgeville and Sandersville, Georgia. Ahold and Bruno's are direct competitors in both of the relevant markets. The draft complaint alleges that the post-merger markets would each be highly concentrated, whether measured by the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (commonly referred to as "HHI") or four-firm concentration ratios. The acquisition would substantially increase concentration in each market. The post-acquisition HHI in each of the geographic markets would be above 5400.

The draft complaint further alleges that entry would not be timely, likely, or sufficient to prevent anticompetitive effects in the relevant geographic markets.

The draft complaint also alleges that Ahold's acquisition of all of the outstanding voting securities of Bruno's, if consummated, may substantially lessen competition in the relevant line of commerce in the relevant markets in violation of Section 7 of the Clayton Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. § 18, and Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, as amended, 15 U.S.C. § 45, by eliminating direct competition between supermarkets owned or controlled by Ahold and supermarkets owned and controlled by Bruno's; by increasing the likelihood that Ahold will unilaterally exercise market power; and by increasing the likelihood of, or facilitating, collusion or coordinated interaction among the remaining supermarket firms. Each of these effects increases the likelihood that the prices of food, groceries or services will increase, and that the quality and selection of food, groceries or services will decrease, in the geographic markets alleged in the complaint.

IV. The Terms of the Agreement Containing Consent Orders

The Agreement Containing Consent Orders (“proposed consent order”) will remedy the Commission's competitive concerns about the proposed acquisition. Under the terms of the proposed consent order, Ahold must divest two BI-LO supermarkets, one in Milledgeville and one in Sandersville, Georgia. In each community, Ahold owns only one supermarket. Both of the divestitures are to experienced up-front buyers who would be new entrants in the relevant geographic markets and who the Commission has pre-evaluated for competitive and financial viability. The Commission's evaluation process consisted of analyzing the financial condition of the proposed acquirers and the locations of their current supermarkets to ensure that divestitures to them would not increase concentration or decrease competition in the relevant markets and to determine that these purchasers are well qualified to operate the divested stores.

In Milledgeville, Ahold will sell its BI-LO to The Kroger Co. (“Kroger”), which is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. Kroger operates supermarkets in southeastern Georgia and throughout the United States. Ahold will sell its BI-LO in Sandersville to Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc. (“Winn-Dixie”), headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. Winn-Dixie also operates supermarkets in southeastern Georgia and throughout the U.S.

Paragraph II.A. of the proposed consent order requires that the divestitures must occur no later than 10 business days after the merger is consummated. However, if Ahold consummates the divestitures to Kroger and Winn-Dixie during the public comment period, and if, at the time the Commission decides to make the order final, the Commission notifies Ahold that Kroger or Winn-Dixie is not an acceptable acquirer or that the asset purchase agreement with Kroger or Winn-Dixie is not an acceptable manner of divestiture, then Ahold must immediately rescind the transaction in question and divest those assets to another buyer within three months of the date the order becomes final. At that time, Ahold must divest those assets only to an acquirer that receives the prior approval of the Commission and only in a manner that receives the prior approval of the Commission. In the event that any Commission-approved buyer is unable to take or keep possession of any of the supermarkets identified for divestiture the Commission may appoint a trustee with the power to divest any assets that have not been divested to satisfy the requirements of the proposed consent order.

The proposed consent order also enables the Commission to appoint a trustee to divest any supermarkets or sites identified in the order that Ahold has not divested to satisfy the requirements of the proposed consent order. In addition, the proposed order enables the Commission to seek civil penalties against Ahold for non-compliance with the proposed consent order.

The proposed consent also requires Proposed Respondents to maintain the viability, marketability and competitiveness of the supermarkets identified for divestitures. Among other requirements related to maintaining operations at these supermarkets, the proposed consent order also specifically requires the Proposed Respondents to: (1) maintain the viability, competitiveness and marketability of the assets to be divested; (2) not cause the wasting or deterioration of the assets to be divested; (3) not sell, transfer, encumber, or otherwise impair their marketability or viability; (4) maintain the supermarkets consistent with past practices; (5) use best efforts to preserve existing relationships

with suppliers, customers, and employees; and (6) keep the supermarkets open for business and maintain the inventory at levels consistent with past practices.

The proposed consent order also prohibits Ahold from acquiring, without providing the Commission with prior notice, any supermarkets, or any interest in any supermarkets, located in the counties that include Milledgeville and Sandersville, Georgia for ten years. These are the areas from which the supermarkets to be divested draw customers. The provisions regarding prior notice are consistent with the terms used in prior Orders. The proposed consent order does not, however, restrict the Proposed Respondents from constructing new supermarkets in the above areas; nor does it restrict the Proposed Respondents from leasing facilities not operated as supermarkets within the previous six months.

The proposed consent also prohibits Ahold, for a period of ten years, from entering into or enforcing any agreement that restricts the ability of any person acquiring any location used as a supermarket, or interest in any location used as a supermarket on or after January 1, 2001, to operate a supermarket at that site if that site was formerly owned or operated by Ahold or Bruno's in any of the above areas. In addition, the Proposed Respondents are prohibited from removing fixtures or equipment from a store or property owned or leased by Ahold or Bruno's in Sandersville or Milledgeville, Georgia, that is no longer operated as a supermarket, except (1) prior to a sale, sublease, assignment, or change in occupancy or (2) to relocate such fixtures or equipment in the ordinary course of business to any other supermarket owned or operated by the Proposed Respondents.

The Proposed Respondents are required to file compliance reports with the Commission, the first of which is due within thirty days of the date on which Proposed Respondents signed the proposed consent, and every thirty days thereafter until the divestitures are completed, and annually for ten years.

V. Opportunity for Public Comment

The proposed consent order has been placed on the public record for 30 days for receipt of comments by interested persons. Comments received during this period will become part of the public record. After 30 days, the Commission will again review the proposed consent order and the comments received and will decide whether it should withdraw from the agreement or make the proposed consent order final.

By accepting the proposed consent order subject to final approval, the Commission anticipates that the competitive problems alleged in the complaint will be resolved. The purpose of this analysis is to invite public comment on the proposed consent order, including the proposed sale of supermarkets to Kroger and Winn-Dixie, in order to aid the Commission in its determination of whether to make the proposed consent order final. This analysis is not intended to constitute an official interpretation of the proposed consent order nor is it intended to modify the terms of the proposed consent order in any way.