WEBINARS

ACCESSING CENTRAL AMERICA: EXPORTING WESTERN U.S. SNACK FOODS

Wednesday, Dec 3, 2025 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM
Registration: Friday, Nov 14 - Wednesday, Dec 3, 2025
Riverside | United States of America

https://www.wusata.org/e/SUB050D

EVENT DETAILS

This seminar is designed for Western U.S. snack food exporters including growers, processors, manufacturers, and food marketers who are seeking to introduce or expand their products in Central American markets. The session will provide a practical overview of regional regulatory requirements, including labeling rules, product registration, tariff structures under CAFTA-DR, and packaging considerations for tropical climates. Participants will learn how to meet import standards, navigate country-specific compliance processes, and prepare products for distribution across both modern and traditional retail channels. The seminar will also explore consumer preferences, price sensitivity, and flavor trends in Central America, along with strategies for identifying and working with reliable distributors, adapting pack sizes, and positioning Western U.S. snack foods for competitive success. Attendees will leave with actionable steps to strengthen their market entry plans, optimize logistics, and build long-term relationships in this growing and dynamic region.

Detailed Webinar Overview:

1. Welcome & Objectives

- Overview of seminar objectives
- Brief introduction to the Central American market landscape for U.S. snack foods
- Why Western U.S. snack products are well-positioned for regional demand

2. Market Overview: Central America's Snack Food Demand

- Regional consumption trends for packaged and ready-to-eat snacks
- Growth of convenience foods and impulse buying
- Key demographic drivers
- Category trends: salty snacks, sweet snacks, better-for-you products, premium/novelty snacks

3. Country-Specific Snapshots

- Costa Rica: premium retail, strong demand for natural/healthy snacks
- Panama: logistics hub, duty-free zones, tourism-driven demand
- Guatemala: largest population, strong mass-market retail
- Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua: price-sensitive consumers, expanding modern retail channels
- Differences in regulatory complexity, port efficiency, and distributor behavior

4. Technical Market Access & Regulations

- Tariff structures under CAFTA-DR and remaining duties
- Labeling requirements
- Registration of processed foods with health ministries
- Shelf-life and packaging considerations for tropical climates

- Import documentation and certificates
- Requirements for samples and small-scale promotional shipments

5. Logistics, Distribution & Shipping Considerations

- Choosing between consolidated shipments vs. full container loads
- Regional distribution hubs
- Cold chain considerations (if applicable) and packaging durability
- Working with customs brokers and local agents
- Managing freight costs and supply chain reliability

6. Retail & E-Commerce Landscape

- Growth of modern supermarkets
- Gas station and convenience store opportunities
- Role of traditional trade
- Emerging e-commerce and delivery apps
- Promotional strategies: sampling, in-store activations, bundling, influencer marketing

7. Product Positioning & Consumer Insights

- Flavor preferences and local taste adaptation
- Affordable pack sizes and value positioning
- Demand for healthier, natural, and clean-label snacks
- Opportunities for premium novelty products targeted at higher-income consumers

6. Case Study: Success Story from an exporter working in the market

- Western U.S. snack companies thriving in the region
- Lessons learned from packaging changes, distributor collaboration, and market timing

7. Q&A

- Interactive Q&A

Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the key regulatory requirements for exporting snack foods to Central America, including labeling, product registration, and documentation.
- Recognize packaging and shelf-life considerations specific to tropical climates and regional logistics.
- Assess consumer preferences, flavor trends, and price expectations in Central American snack markets.
- Evaluate the retail landscape and distinguish between opportunities in modern supermarkets, traditional trade, convenience channels, and emerging e-commerce platforms.
- Apply strategies for adapting product sizes, packaging, and marketing messages for Central American consumers.
- Develop practical market entry plans, including phased approaches and prioritizing target countries or cities.
- Build long-term relationships with regional buyers and distributors while navigating cultural, commercial, and logistical differences.

The Western United States Agricultural Trade Association (WUSATA) is a non-profit trade association whose members are the thirteen western state departments of agriculture. WUSATA is administered by the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) and funded through the Market Access Program (MAP) with a mission to support and assist members and agribusinesses in the 13 western states in developing and enhancing international markets for U.S. food and agricultural products. 4601 NE 77th Ave, Suite 240, Vancouver, WA, 98662 | www.wusata.org | (360) 693-3373