

PEOPLE

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FLORIDA PRODUCE OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY EARNS LICENSE TO OPEN A FACILITY IN CUBA

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For the first time in over 60 years, an American company has been granted permission to establish a physical presence on Cuban soil. Tampa-based, Florida Produce of Hillsborough County, Inc. (Florida Produce) has been granted a license, which permits the firm to open a warehouse facility in Cuba, designed to enable trade between U.S.-based companies and Cuba.

The announcement comes on the heels of revisions announced by U.S. Department of Treasury and the Department of Commerce on September 18, 2015 which expanded upon initial regulations introduced on January 16, 2015. Under the guidelines, firms that fall into one of twelve designated categories will be allowed to establish a physical presence in Cuba, employ Cuban nationals, open and maintain bank accounts in Cuba, and employ U.S. citizens to work in Cuba. The Florida Produce facility is expected to store food, drinking water, liquor, telecommunications equipment, building equipment, restaurant equipment and agricultural equipment. It will also serve as a physical location which will enable parties to directly transfer title and goods upon payment, as permitted under the newly expanded guidelines.

"This is the first step toward more open trade with Cuba," said Florida Produce President, Mike Mauricio. "We look forward to assisting U.S. businesses, both with providing a physical location to conduct trade on Cuban soil, as well as through private consultation services on how to properly and legally navigate business channels in Cuba."

On Monday, October 26, 2015, Mr. Mauricio, Florida Produce partner Manuel Fernandez, and his legal counsel Tim Hunt with Hill Ward Henderson, met in Washington D.C. with members of the U.S. State

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Department. On the same day, Florida Produce representatives met with Cuban government officials at the Cuban Embassy in Washington D.C. At that time, Florida Produce presented a proposal to establish its Warehouse Distribution Facility in Cuba. Mr. Mauricio and Mr. Fernandez will be traveling to Havana in the near future to continue negotiations with the Cuban government.

Florida Produce has successfully conducted business in Cuba for over 15 years. In 2001, it earned the first license granted in Florida for food sales, and was the first Florida company to conduct food sales with Cuba since the U.S. Embargo over 40 years earlier. Florida Produce has supplied Cuba with fresh fruits and vegetables including apples, pears, grapes, raisins, dried fruits and dehydrated coconut. In addition, company president, Mike Mauricio, has advised on and brokered agreements between a number of U.S.-based businesses and ALIMPORT, the government agency which oversees and purchases goods for Cuba. Most notably was a 2005 contract, estimated at \$30 million, that facilitated the export of northern beans from Nebraska to Cuba. The deal was secured following a trade mission that was led by Governor Dave Hineman, 14 members of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, and a number of Nebraska bean growers.

Parties interested in consultation services or learning more about doing business in Cuba should contact Tim Hunt of Hill Ward Henderson, Attorneys at Law, at tim.hunt@hwlaw.com, or by calling (813) 227-8451.