

# U.S. Buys Produce Linked to Mafia

By Jack Anderson  
and Les Whitten

The Defense Department has bought \$1.1 million worth of tomatoes, strawberries and cantaloupes from a firm whose top salesman is alleged Mafia godfather Carlos Marcello.

The produce was approved by still another federal agency, the Agriculture Department, which dutifully inspected the reputed Mafia man's tomatoes and pronounced them suitable for government soups and salads.

Then the Cosa Nostra comestibles were distributed to Army, Navy and Air Force installations in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and Panama.

At least two civilian agencies, the Public Health Service and Veterans Administration, also got tomatoes from Marcello through the Defense Department.

Although responsible government officials privately insist they don't like doing business with a reputed Mafia generalissimo, they are obliged by law to buy their tomatoes from the lowest bidder. Not unless the tomatoes fail to pass muster with the Agriculture Department can they be rejected.

The Justice Department has brought pressure on government agencies not to do business with mob-tainted companies. But Mafia lawyers have sued to stop such discrimination.

Marcello is identified in secret government files as "the top ranking member of the Mafia in (the) New Orleans area." He "gained (his) reputation through terroristic activities," the files also reveal.

The public record of his syndicate connections dates back

to the Kefauver hearings of the 1950s. He figured again in the "Joe Valachi" hearings of the 1960s and the House crime hearings of the 1970s.

The House hearings indicated he was a \$1,600-a-month "salesman" for the Pelican Tomato Co. of New Orleans. Reputed to be an effective salesman, he started out in 1962-63 by helping to wangle a tough contract with several supermarkets.

For the record, Marcello has said only that he is "a public relations man for Pelican Tomato and also adviser to Pelican Tomato." He has sworn under oath he has never been in the Mafia.

Ostensibly, he works for Joseph Matassa, the company secretary-treasurer, with whom Marcello was indicted and acquitted on a jury tampering charge in 1965.

"He is always a gentleman," said Matassa of Marcello. The tomato tycoon denied any knowledge of Marcello's alleged Mafia ties. "We never do anything with anybody but good people," he said. We were unable to reach Marcello.

More on Martin — President Ford stubbornly insisted last week that American Ambassador Graham Martin did a "good job" of directing the evacuation from South Vietnam.

"I never had much faith in Monday morning quarterbacks or grandstand quarterbacks," said the President. "I would rather put faith in the man who carried out a very successful evacuation."

Apparently, this barb was aimed at us. We began reporting last month how Martin was botching the evacuation. Because there is a lesson to be learned from every disaster, it may be worthwhile to review the facts.

Actually, the story began before Martin arrived in Saigon in July, 1973. We reported on Feb. 1, 1973, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff expected the cease-fire to break down and the Communists to win control of all Vietnam.

"Secretly, the Joint Chiefs don't believe President Thieu can survive . . ." we wrote. "(They) have grave doubts about the South Vietnamese army's ability to repel an offensive without massive American air and artillery support."

Martin emphatically disagreed with this assessment, and he never lost faith in President Thieu until Saigon began collapsing around his ears.

Even the rout of Thieu's armies in the north didn't shake Martin. He insisted that the South Vietnamese army would dig in, hold the line and then throw the Communists back.

When the Saigon defenses also began to collapse, his advisers wanted to encourage the formation of a government that could negotiate a truce. This would permit the United States to bow out of Vietnam, they con-

tended, with some degree of honor.

But the militant Martin called instead for President Thieu to form a stronger war cabinet and to stiffen the resistance against the Hanoi forces.

Even after Thieu fled the country with a parting blast at the United States, Martin thought there was time to negotiate an honorable settlement. He delayed the evacuation, therefore, to avoid throwing Saigon into chaos.

The Air Force officer in charge of the evacuation effort in Saigon, Brig. Gen. Richard Baughn, kept pressing to move Americans and their Vietnamese supporters out. In desperation, he began flying out Vietnamese employees without Martin's authorization.

The ambassador angrily demanded Baughn's dismissal right in the middle of the evacuation preparations. A successor was rushed to Saigon to take over. But in the end, tens of thousands of Vietnamese, who had worked for the Americans and could have been rescued, were left behind.

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