

Before you load your next container

A practical guide to FDA readiness, landed cost, product mix and the business case behind your next shipment.

Fabrice Abunde, PhD · October 4, 2026 · 5 min read



Editorial illustration. All numerical examples are illustrative, not customer results or guarantees.

A product list is not a sourcing strategy

Ask an importer what will go into the next container and the answer may be precise: "300 cartons of this. 200 of that. Add 100 of the new product. Fill the remaining space with what sold last time."

Now ask why those quantities. The answer may come from the previous shipment, a supplier recommendation, a few buyer requests or an estimate of what will fit. Those inputs are useful, but they leave the economics partly unexplained.

Start with the products, destination, capital and demand evidence. Model the economics. Then review the recommended mix and quantities before committing to production.

A product list is therefore a good starting point for Gloway. You do not need to turn it into a final loading plan alone. The business case gives each proposed quantity a commercial reason.

Two tests before the money leaves

A distributor can know exactly how many cartons fit in a container and still have an incomplete sourcing decision. The quantities answer a logistics question. They do not establish whether the products can enter the destination market or whether the inventory is worth buying.

For U.S. African and Caribbean food distributors, a useful plan begins with two questions: Can it clear? Can it pay? Compliance and commercial economics need to be considered together, before production and loading make changes expensive.

Check the manufacturer, relevant facility-registration status, product specifications, packaging, labeling and documentation against applicable U.S. FDA requirements.

Model landed cost, realistic selling prices, demand, expected gross profit and the time inventory may take to sell.

FDA explains that importers are responsible for ensuring imported food is safe, sanitary and labeled according to U.S. requirements, and that noncompliant shipments may be detained. Facility registration is one requirement; it is not approval of the product or a guarantee that the shipment will clear. Product-specific requirements and importer obligations still need review.

Gloway helps coordinate FDA compliance support alongside sourcing execution. The scope and responsibilities should be established for each transaction rather than inferred from a registration number.

Start with landed cost, not the supplier invoice

A factory quote is only one part of the inventory investment. Packaging, origin preparation, freight and destination costs change the economics. The business case should state which costs are confirmed, which are estimated and which remain missing.

Example 1 / Build the landed-cost model

Cost component	Illustrative amount
Manufacturer / product cost	\$42,000
Packaging and preparation	\$4,000
Compliance support and origin handling	\$2,000
Freight and logistics	\$12,000
Duties, clearance and other costs	\$10,000
Total modeled landed cost	\$70,000

Expected sales\$150,000	Modeled landed cost\$70,000	Expected gross profit\$80,000
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Illustrative amounts from the Gloway guide, not quoted rates. Gross profit = expected sales – modeled landed cost. Downstream operating expenses, financing costs and taxes are excluded.

The \$70,000 is the total inventory cost in this simplified scenario. The cash needed before loading may differ when deposits, payment terms, timing and additional working-capital needs are considered. A complete plan distinguishes total cost from the schedule of cash commitments.

A cheaper container is not automatically the better decision

Consider the two simplified options below. Both need evidence that the proposed selling prices and quantities are realistic. The higher-profit option also needs more capital and may carry different demand and execution risks.

Example 2 / Compare the economics before approval

Metric	Container A	Container B
Capital committed	\$40,000	\$70,000
Expected sales	\$60,000	\$150,000
Expected gross profit	\$20,000	\$80,000
Gross profit / committed capital	50.0%	114.3%
Gross margin / sales	33.3%	53.3%

Illustrative comparison from the Gloway guide. The ratios are gross-profit measures, not net ROI or annualized returns. No equal sell-through period is assumed.

Container B requires \$30,000 more capital and projects \$60,000 more gross profit. That is a reason to investigate it, not an automatic instruction to buy it. A slow sales cycle, unproven prices or insufficient funding

can make the apparently stronger option unsuitable.

Ask what would change the decision

Before approving the base case, test a few plausible changes. If expected selling prices fall or freight rises, does the transaction remain commercially acceptable? Show the assumptions explicitly rather than burying them in one attractive profit number.

Example 3 / Stress-test the \$70,000 landed-cost case

Scenario	Sales	Landed cost	Gross profit
Base case	\$150,000	\$70,000	\$80,000
Selling prices 10% lower	\$135,000	\$70,000	\$65,000
Freight 25% higher	\$150,000	\$73,000	\$77,000
Both changes	\$135,000	\$73,000	\$62,000

New illustrative sensitivity calculation. Freight rises from \$12,000 to \$15,000. The sales change assumes all quantities sell and a uniform 10% price reduction; timing, spoilage and other costs are unchanged.

Turn the approved plan into a live business case

The model becomes useful during execution when supplier allocations, production, payments and shipment milestones are tied to it. If a manufacturer cannot supply a priority SKU, the replacement should be reviewed for commercial impact as well as availability.

After landing, compare actual costs, prices and inventory movement with the plan. A shipment that arrived on time but required deep discounting teaches a different lesson from one that sold at the expected price.

What to prepare for your next container

- Your destination warehouse and target buyers.
- Product categories, mandatory SKUs and customer commitments.
- Available capital and any payment-timing constraints.
- Current selling prices and previous sales history where available.
- Required delivery timing and supplier preferences.

Exact final quantities are not required to start. Those quantities should emerge from the market, economics and operating constraints. The objective is an explicit decision that can be reviewed before purchase and measured afterwards.

Sources and further reading

[GloSource white paper](#) · [Gloway Profit-Led Cross-Border Sourcing Guide](#) · [FDA: Importing Food Products into the United States](#)

Adapted from Gloway's sourcing guide, GloSource white paper and product architecture. Additional worked calculations are identified in their captions.

Build the business case for your next shipment.

Bring your product priorities, destination, available budget and sales history where available.