MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR FROZEN FISH EXPORTERS IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is marketing strategies for frozen fish exporters in Bangladesh. Frozen fish is the second highest export earning sector of the country The major findings are holistic marketing concept can be applied for exporting frozen fish, cost based pricing as well as other pricing methods can be exercised with the proper consideration of cost related elements. Farmers may sell their products directly to the buyers. There is no substitute for a good working relationship with the foreign buyers. These good long-term relationships are best established through making contacts and building partnerships. Participation at trade shows and trade missions, shipping samples to potential buyers, sending letters and faxes, and making telephone calls should be strategy to expand market share. Possible risks to be handled include; government regulations, Patents, Predatory pricing, economy of scale, research and development, distribution agreement. A descriptive framework has been made in order to understand the marketing strategies for frozen fish exporters in Bangladesh. This study adopts with qualitative in nature. This research enables researchers to understand the concept, pricing methods, how to expand the market, promotional measures and how possible risks to be handled.

Keywords: Frozen Fish, Exporters, Marketing Strategies

INTRODUCTION:

Bangladesh is a densely populated agro-economy based country in Southeast Asia, with a population of 14.79 cores and an area of 147,570 square km. The average per capita accessible land resources are limited for agricultural production. In the past half a century, environmental degradation of land and aquatic habitats along with frequent natural disasters have affected the national economy(BBS, 2011).

Fisheries are now considered as the most effective sector for employment generation, 63% of the total protein consumption and are the second highest export earning sector of the country (DoF, 2006).

During the last two decades, significant growth rates in fisheries production have been achieved by expansion of closed water aquaculture through the intervention of production technologies and adoption of community based fisheries management for conservation and sustainable exploration of open water fisheries resources. More than 15 million people are directly or indirectly dependent on the fisheries sector for their livelihood. Therefore, government and development partners have given priority attention to promote this sector. The food safety and quality control regulations of Bangladesh are mostly based on EU and USFDA regulations as they are the major consumers of exported products (Cato and Subasinge, 2003).

In the early 1980s, recognizing both the potential for exports of fish and fisheries products and the problems concerning safety and quality of the products, FAO came forward to develop product standards, regulations, and fish inspection schemes for Bangladesh. In 1983, the Bangladesh government created a Fish and Fish Products Ordinance (Inspection and Quality Control Ordinance 1983) and in 1985 upgraded the inspection laboratory and its personnel (Cato and Subasinge, 2003).

This ordinance was created under the prevailing situation of the processing sector to comply with the safety regulations following from that period, which required upgrading. FAO initiated another project in 1996 to assist in the preparation of a fish safety and quality control programmed for the shrimp and fish processing plants in Bangladesh based on the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) approach. The program provided training in HACCP procedures to both the public and private sectors (Cato and Subasinge, 2003).

For the purposes of Regulation EC 852/2004 and Regulation EC 853/2004, food businesses and FBOs are defined as follows:

“Food business means any undertaking, whether for profit or not and whether public or private, carrying out any stage of production, processing and/or distribution of food”. This includes all primary producers, importers, wholesalers, transporters, exporters, retailers, caterers, manufacturers, market stalls, mobile vans, and any other business importing, exporting, handling, storing, transporting, preparing and selling food. “Food business operator (FBO) means the natural or legal persons responsible for ensuring that the requirements of food law are met within the food business under their control Fresh water fish: The fresh water fisheries in Bangladesh mostly depend on numerous indigenous fish and shrimp species. During the last four decades, some important carp, catfish, perch and other large and small fish species have been introduced in the aquaculture production system (Rahman, 1989).

Research is ongoing on the reproduction, genetic improvement and culture technologies of all these species. As mentioned earlier, carp and catfish are the most common fish groups in Bangladesh contributing the lion share of the fresh water fish production both in aquaculture and open water capture fisheries (DoF, 2006).

Only two shrimp species, the brackish water black tiger shrimp (*P. monodon*) and fresh water giant prawn (*M. rogenbergii*) is now exported mostly collected from farm production sources (DoF 2007). The marine catch: Bangladesh has diverse marine resources with more than 100 commercially important fish species.

The vast majority of species exploited are demersal fishes. The major marine fish species or groups harvested are Hilsa, pomfret, catfish, jawfish, ribbonfish, Bombay duck, Aila, Indian salmon and sharks. Among the pelagic fishes, Hilsa alone contributes a major quantity of the mechanized boat commercial catches; other pelagic fish catches are much less in quantity (DoF, 2007).

The most important marine shellfishes are shrimp species such as tiger shrimp, white shrimp and brown shrimp along with lobsters, crabs, molluscs and cephalopods. Large fish is whole frozen (IQF), headless and gutted (belly-clean) or processed as slices, fillets or steaks in IQF and block frozen. Small fish is whole block frozen. Large IQF fish or blocks are wrapped with polyethylene sheets or put in polyethylene bags and then packed into a master carton wrapped with Hessian cloth. The main markets of the frozen fish products are the EU countries, USA, Japan, China, Canada and Thailand (DoF, 2007).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- To find out the marketing concept to be used;
- To find out pricing methods to be applied;
- To find out how to expand the market;

- To find out what promotional measures to be adopted;
- To find out possible risk to be handled;

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

According to the nature of the study and type of information required personal visit and interviews with the concerned executives was conducted. This study adopts with qualitative in nature. Besides primary information and secondary information was collected from the frozen fish exporters' firms and other sources.

FINDINGS:

Concept to be used:

To identify potential markets and types of products to be sold it is imperative that firms interested in exporting take time to research the markets where they are interested in selling products. By building a knowledge base about different countries, the new exporter will be able to pinpoint those countries that are most suited for his/her products. Once countries are targeted, it is essential to become knowledgeable about those countries and develop a consistent pattern of trade contacts with importers. Focusing on one or two countries before branching out can help determine a firm's strengths, weaknesses, and limitations in serving export markets. Once the new exporters develop expertise, they may feel confident about testing new markets and products to diversify their portfolio.

When considering which products to sell overseas, firms should conduct a holistic analysis of potential markets as well as their own capabilities. Items to be considered include type of products (whole or dressed products, fillets, live products, and canned products), availability of the resources (species, quality, and quantity), transportation mode, and proximity to airports and ports. Success in the export market may involve adapting the production plant to produce foreign grades and specifications.

Holistic marketing performance is reflected in the delivery of long-term economic, social, and environmental value to customer, to employee, to supplier, to community, to stakeholders of a business in order to enhance sustainable financial performance. So, holistic marketing concept is applicable for frozen fish exporting.

The main actors in frozen fish value chains are: Farmers, Ice factories, Middlemen, Processing industries and customers

To start traceability system, farmers who are registered are considered. Ice factories play an important role in hygienic system which also included in the traceability systems. Middlemen play an important role in the traceability system. They have to collect fish from farmers and need to collect required information. Processing pant play twofold role, collect and record information about all fishes they receive and all process parameters need to be recorded according to the process flow.

Pricing methods to be used:

Proper pricing, complete and accurate quotations, and choice of terms for the sale are all crucial in selling fishery products in foreign markets. Initial pricing should be directed at market entry for a long-term export commitment. Price should also be high enough to generate a reasonable profit, but still be competitive and attractive to buyers, agents, etc.

When quoting a price, exporters should consider the following factors: foreign exchange rates; packaging; insurance; freight; tariffs and duties; Inspection fees; other fees, etc. In addition, a realistic price margin for unforeseen costs, unavoidable risks, and simple mistakes those are common in any new undertaking.

How much should we charge for frozen fish? Real-life implementation of this seemingly simple calculation is not so easy. To determine the price, the marketer should consider: product, customers, competitiveness, and quality.

Frozen fish is marketed to more affluent consumers. Frozen fish can be prepared in a variety of ways. Frozen fish are marketed primarily to more affluent customers and upscale restaurants, wholesale and retail market. Frozen fish must compete with more expensive seafood, such as fresh tuna, swordfish, and lobster. Frozen fish also competes with more expensive cuts of beef, such as rib-eye steak and filet mignon. Frozen fish is also a high-quality protein source that is sold either fresh or frozen. Fish is high in protein and low in saturated fats. In a 3.5-ounce serving, fish has only between 90-95 calories, 18-20 grams of protein, and no more than 1 gram of fat.

The following pricing strategies outline common methods used to determine the price.

Cost-plus:

Pricing structure adds a constant percentage of profit above the cost of producing product. Difficulties are encountered in accurately assessing fixed and variable costs.

Competitive

Competitive is the simplest and the most common in niche marketing. Price is based on prices of competing products.

Perceived-Value:

Perceived-value pricing is based on non-price factors such as quality, healthfulness, or prestige.
If quantity demanded and supplied will be equal at each level then mark-up rules can be used for frozen fish.

Expand the market:

To expand sales by introducing new products include: raw frozen fish, semi processed and processed frozen fish. Promoting consumer awareness of the convenience and value for money of frozen fish and developing consumer recognition of the quality should be applied. To expand frozen fish market the marketer should offer-a product quality higher than people are used to in frozen fish and with a personality that combined efficiency, hygiene, confidence, and completeness.
There are many places where frozen fish marketers can sell their products to expand the market. Farmers may sell their products directly to the consumer or to other businesses which then sell them to consumers.

4.3.1 Direct-Retail

Direct retail sales are a good place to start if supplies are small or availability uncertain. There are four categories of direct retail sales: farm side sales, farmer's markets, roadside stands, and fee-fishing.

4.3.2 Direct Wholesale

Depending on the species and supply situation, direct wholesaling may be an excellent way to market product. Most wholesale customers have a strong preference for steady, year-round supplies. It is not necessary to travel great distances to large cities to market your product. Think locally and look for the markets internationally.

4.3.3 Restaurants

Restaurants like to have small quantities delivered one to three times every week. Restaurant chefs often require a processed product.

4.3.4 Supermarkets

Supermarkets are a good place to sell large volumes of frozen fish products. Deliveries are usually made one to two times every week and the product is most often processed.

4.3.5 Specialty-Stores

Ethnic groceries and health-food stores are often overlooked markets. Ethnic markets often prefer the fish to be live, in the round, or drawn.

PROMOTIONAL MEASURES TO BE ADOPTED:

In order to sell fishery products overseas, it is necessary to advertise. The advertising effort actually begins at home, as the exporter first contacts with potential overseas buyers and introduces company and products to target markets. There is no substitute for a good working relationship with the foreign buyers. These good long-term relationships are best established through making contacts and building partnerships. Participation at trade shows and trade missions, shipping samples to potential buyers, sending letters and faxes, and making telephone calls should be strategy. For example, after meeting a fishery products buyer at an overseas trade show and making a few shipments, it may be advantageous to invite the buyer to visit facility in order to strengthen the relationship. Increasing business will ultimately depend on providing solutions to buyers' problems, and this will require a full understanding of their needs.
Six services (promotional support, buyer alerts, trade leads, foreign buyers' lists, suppliers' lists, and trade shows) to help exporters get their product overseas. These services include counseling, marketing funds, locating buyers, advertising services, trade shows, etc:
Products are promoted to create new customers. Promotion requires time that should be an integral part of business plan. Promotion should be clear, to the point, and focused.

4.4.1 Print

Printed materials, including newspapers, magazines, and flyers, allow marketers to explain the what, when, where, and why people should buy from particular company or a country.

4.4.2 Generic

Generic promotion examples are a state aquaculture association; a department of agriculture, who develop generic promotional campaigns for state-grown products; or large marketing groups, such as the frozen fish Institute.

4.4.3 Trade Leads

Trade leads are inquiries submitted by foreign buyers for specific products. They are transmitted electronically to the Ag Export Connections Office by FAS trade officers in nearly 50 countries. Foreign buyers submitted more than 4,500 trade leads last year, which helped facilitate export sales of more than $500 million. Trade leads may be accessed through the following means:

4.4.4 Internet—Trade Leads are available on a daily basis through the FAS home page. Exporter can access new trade leads each day or search for previous trade leads by country, product, or date. In addition to trade leads, the home page contains information on a wide range of FAS programs and services, as well as trade statistics and foreign market reports. Homepage: http://www.fas.usda.gov/agexport/ Trade Lead query. Trade leads are also available on other private and public bulletin boards. Contact State agriculture department, trade office or chamber of commerce to determine if this service is available locally.

44.5 Fax Polling

Another way to receive trade leads is by fax. Just poll the Ag Export fax system each week using your own fax machine. The information is free. Exporters pay only for the cost of the call. The number to call to poll the machine with information on fish and seafood products is (202) 720-8980. Instructions on how to poll for trade leads are available by calling (202) 690-3416.

4.4.6 Newspapers, trade journals, newsletters—

Trade leads may also appear in newsletters or trade journals published by private firms or State and local government offices. Check with State agriculture department, trade office or chamber of commerce for further information.

POSSIBLE RISK TO BE HANDLED:

Export processing industries in Bangladesh are mostly based on traditional knowledge on handling and processing of fresh and frozen shrimps (head on/off) collected from farmed or catch sources. The processing factories personnel do not have good technical knowledge how to handle and process carps or catfish from fresh water and marine resources.

Their workers lack skills and technical expertise and machinery and technology is not advanced enough to produce good quality fish fillets or other diversified fish products for export in the competitive international market. Therefore, they could not able to utilize the available carp or catfish raw materials for producing quality export products. As fish handling and processing activities are quite limited in the industry, the workers could not increase their skills, efficiency and experience. On the other hand, the dependence of all processing plants on shrimp results in a shortage of raw materials and finally limits the utilization of the processing factories.

This situation also enhances competition for raw materials and to some extent the processing plant owners collect shrimp ignoring quality aspects and finally fail to get the expected price in the competitive market. Even such quality compromises may create future image problem in the strictly regulated export market for Bangladesh. About 50% of the leading processing industries have good technical, management capabilities and regulatory compliance to the export market but they are now not running well due to lack of raw materials.

Out of 131 shrimp/fish processing plants 67 are maintaining International Food Standard (IFS) graded (>90% QM Score) and have EU licenses for the export of shrimp and fish (DoF 2007). To sustain the small and large factories, their economically feasible utilization must be ensured. There are no other alternatives but for them to develop technological and management efficiency for handling and processing available carps, catfish and other fishes as raw materials to utilize the existing processing facilities. The supply of these fish to the factories can be easily increased in Bangladesh, which might not be equally possible for shrimps in a cost effective way.

In the domestic market, most of the rural consumers have limited income levels and lower purchasing capacity that makes them unable to pay a good price for the fish. About two thirds of the population lives in rural areas and a major part of them consumes their required fish either from own/leased household ponds or from natural open water resources. Market prices of fresh harvested or iced preserved fish are comparatively higher (50-200%) in urban markets. But involvement of middlemen at several steps in the long marketing chain deprives the producers from having a good price.

Due to inadequate cold storage facilities and the unavailability of good quality ice in the growing area, farmers or fishermen tend to sell their fish as early as possible to middlemen before spoilage. Other than shrimp farming regions, there are limited facilities for farmers to directly sell their fish/shrimps in a scheduled market place without interference of middleman.

Medium and large scale farmers arrange their own transport to sell their fish or shrimps to the processing factory or market at nearer towns or the large cities. Similarly, some intermediary collecting agents collect fishes from fishermen after fishing in open water or sea at recognized landing stations and they successively handle, grading, cooling, preserve, transport and sale of the fish to the next market or processing plant.

In pond aquaculture harvesting usually begins in October and continues up to March. During the same period, open water fishes are also mostly harvested and supplied to the same market. Due to inadequate storage facilities and a large supply of aquaculture fishes in the harvesting season, the price goes down and farmers do not get their expected profit

Large aquaculture farms are now suffering from marketing of their fast growing carp and catfish production. They could not utilize their farm production capacity. During the last ten years, along with the carp, semi-intensive and intensive farming of Thai catfish Pangus largely increased due to its higher production performance within limited time and space. Because of increasing production costs and gradual price decreases in the domestic market, the profit margin is being reduced and they are losing interest. On the other hand, production of shrimps for the export market has limited scope to grow fast due to several biological and environmental limiting factors. It is easier to utilize the carp and catfish aquaculture potentiality and increase production many times. If these raw materials could be handled and processed properly to produce diversified high quality and safe fisheries products, the processing industry could run well and utilize the efficiency of processing plants.

Under the prevailing situation discussed above, it is clear that the existing drawbacks of the processing and export industries in Bangladesh are not due to a shortage of fish but rather more to the technical and management efficiency required for utilizing these valuable resources. Adopting good experience of shrimp industries achieved during the last ten years, initiatives should be taken to improve the technical and management issues concerned in fish processing. If they can successfully utilize the carp and catfish raw materials for production of high quality and safe fish products like other countries, the existing drawbacks of the industry could be overcome enabling fisheries to contribute more to export earnings, employment and the national economy as a whole.

The most important limiting factor is the lack of technical knowledge about fish Possible risks to be handled include; government regulations, Patents, Predatory pricing, economy of scale, research and development, distribution agreement. The chief problems arise from the concentration of processing into a short time space, the reliability of machinery, the lack of skilled labor. Much of the machinery are imported from the US and Canada, and capital costs are high those risks have to be handled for exporting frozen fish.

The main limitations in the existing Bangladesh fish processing practices are: Long and complicated supply chains leading to handling stress. Fish remains un-gutted for a long time - from harvesting to until they have arrived at the landing station, fish depot or the factory, poor availability of cost-effective quality ice and lack of proper icing. Furthermore, icing is not considered as cost-effective to fishermen, improper training, poor technical knowledge and operating skills e.g. regarding spoilage factors, importance of low temperature and gutting of fish.

To process and market cost effective, safe, high quality products fulfilling the demands of consumers as well as complying with legal requirements, the processing industry should follow a suitable production plan depending on its own resources. Before going for any processing operation, some important factors should be carefully considered, such as analyzing the customers' demands for types and specifications of fish products, quality and safety requirements, and price and market sustainability.

Adequate resource information about the desired fish products like stock information, availability of fish species, size, and age are preferable. For marine catch, the fishing ground, area, season, spawning, migration or other biological information, fishing vessel, gear, weather etc. is relevant. Careful analysis is necessary of the cost-effectiveness of fishing operations for the particular species and market accessibility of by-products from the fish raw materials.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion we can say that holistic marketing concept can be applied for exporting frozen fish. Cost based pricing as well as other pricing methods can be exercised with the proper consideration of cost related elements. Farmers may sell their products directly to the buyer. There is no substitute for a good working relationship with the foreign buyers. These good long-term relationships are best established through making contacts and building partnerships. Participation at trade shows and trade missions, shipping samples to potential buyers, sending letters and faxes, and making telephone calls should be strategy.

The current fish supply chain of fish harvesting from different aquaculture and natural resources to the processing factory or to the consumer is quite long involving many middlemen resulting in excessive handling stress and loss of fish freshness and quality. For export purposes, some selected fish suppliers (large or mid level aquaculture farms, open-water fishermen, depot owners and marine fishing trawler crews) could be trained and collect fish raw materials for a better price based on a quality index. Subsequently, other suppliers would be aware and interested to be trained in good handling practices and keeping quality of harvested fish as in the shrimp sector. For concerned government officials (who will acts as trainers), all concerned stake holders in the supply chain and processing factory personnel (who will receive the fish), development of training manuals should be initiated.

Some research initiatives need to be taken for optimizing the technical issues relevant to each step of harvesting, handling, preservation and transport subjected to different habitat, time, temperature and other correlated factors

applicable to carp, catfish or other important fish species. BFFEA can take it as a part of their shrimp handling and processing task, to transfer the knowledge of good handling about fish as they successfully practice for shrimp.

Other plants also maintain required standards to get renewals or new licenses from the DoF. Previously, processing plants have imported their machineries for shrimp and their workers skills and experience are oriented to mostly to frozen shrimp processing. But most of the upgrading factories have minimum machineries for processing of fish and some of them have already started to process fish in small amounts.

Regarding the safety and quality assurance system of Bangladesh fish processing, most efforts have been made in the shrimp industry as a prioritized export commodity. The Fish and Fish Products (Inspection and Quality Control) Act, 1997 has the general regulations for fish products but is mostly focused on post-harvest safety and quality control measures of shrimps based on HACCP principles.

In the last decade, the supply chain of shrimps from farm to factory has become better organized, which does not apply in the case of fish. Utilizing the good experience from shrimps, quality and safety management in the fish supply and processing chain could also be developed. Some important additional pre-harvest safety measures are required both for fish and shrimps to avoid environmental contamination (chemical and biological) before harvesting the products. Particularly, for aquaculture fish or shrimps, these factors should be taken into prior consideration which might be the major sources of raw materials to the export industry.

Recent studies and reports have also highlighted this issue (Pichler, 2007) as there have been no cost-effective curative options for environmentally contaminated products rather prevention measures are the only solution. To ensure the safety and quality assurance of fish and shrimp products in Bangladesh, the following actions should be taken as early as possible: Qualitative and quantitative strengthening of existing fish inspection and quality control services under the DoF providing required training to the existing FIQC personnel as well as gradual recruitment of new staff in short term and long term career plans. Required training manuals, guidelines, check-lists etc. need to be developed on inspections, GAP, GMP, GHP and SSOP for the inspection personnel to upgrade their knowledge about the changing food safety regulations and their implications. Increase required logistical support for the FIQC to ensure minimum technical and inspection services to the stakeholders, utilizing the existing human resources. Strengthen laboratory facilities and expertise to get international accreditation and ensure quality laboratory services to the stakeholders and exporters-importers.

Some legislative change needs to be adopted to impose the necessary control on input supply systems such as quality and use of imported or local aquaculture inputs, relevant business and environmental management.

To establish a well defined fish supply chain with all relevant traceability information, aquaculture farms should be gradually be registered and linked to the local government extension services.

This is essential for transfer of technology, checking utilization of safe inputs, documentation of culture practices. It is very difficult to register thousands of farmers but could be initiated with selective large farmers and organizing local associations of small pond operators.

Other stakeholders playing an important role to collect, handle, preserve and transport fish, fish depots in landing stations and markets also need to be enlisted. Then they should be registered according to the skills upgrading through training giving special benefit to attract good handling practices.

To avoid fish spoilage and microbiological hazards after harvesting of fish requires handling facilities in landing stations, fish depots and a supply of quality ice should be ensured at concerned places. Ice factories should be selected, registered, and staff trained and equipped with required machineries to adopt them producing quality ice for fish and providing a marketing channel of quality ice under private entrepreneurship.

More strong linkages and coordination need to be developed with government and international agencies, researchers, private sector entrepreneurs, all stake holders, fish exporters and consumers to exchange views, identify problems and prospects, take decisions and prompt actions. An updated Management Information System (MIS) should be developed for collection, exchange and access of recent information to all concerned.

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ANNEXURE:

Table-1: Outlines the elements of pricing goods for export
If at all possible, marketer should quote the price in U.S. dollars. This will provide some protection against international currency fluctuations. Current benchmark, or average, prices for specific species and grades of fishery products in international trade may be obtained from the publications and newsletters.

Table 1: Elements of Pricing Goods for Export

Terms of Sale	EXW ex-works	FCA free carrier	FAS free alongside ship	FOB free on board	CFR cost freight	CIF cost insurance & freight	CPT carriage paid to	CIP carriage insurance paid to	DAF delivered at frontier	DES delivered ex ship	DEQ delivered ex quay	DDU delivered duty unpaid	DDP delivered duty paid
Warehouse Services	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Export Packing	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Forwarder Fees	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Loading at Point of Origin	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Inland Freight	B	E	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Port Receiving Charges	B	E	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Export Clearance	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Ocean/Air Freight	B	B	B	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Marine Insurance	B	B	B	B	B	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Charges in Foreign Port	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S	S	S
Customs Clearance	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S
Customs Duties	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S
Delivery Charges to Final	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	S	S

B: Buyer Pays S: Seller Pays E: Either May Pay
Source: First National Bank
