

English 203

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## **The Social and Ethical Environment of Business: Greengrocers**

Greengrocers, a major food company in the United States, stores cans and bottles of packaged foods such as vegetables, fruits, cereal, and meats in its warehouses. The quality of the food in the packages declines over time. Therefore, an expiration date is stamped on the packages, after which the product cannot be sold, even though the food in the packages is not spoiled and is still edible. Were it not for strict rules laid down by the government, the expiration date could easily be pushed to the future and the food would still be fit for human consumption. Packages with expired dates are returned to Greengrocers, where they are destroyed.

Recently an opportunity appeared for Greengrocers to use the expired food packages. A hurricane had devastated parts of Mexico, leaving people homeless and without food. Greengrocers decided to make a generous donation of free packaged food to destitute Mexicans, and this was announced with great fanfare. The U.S. military transported the food on one of its relief flights. The donation was reported in the national media, and Greengrocers received favorable publicity as a socially responsible firm stepping in to lessen human misery in the highest tradition of American generosity.

The donated packages, of course, had expired dates. Mexico's laws on selling food products with expired dates were very weak and rarely enforced. Greengrocers managers assumed people would rather have food with expired dates than no food. In any case, the food was still edible. In addition, Greengrocers could claim a charitable contribution tax deduction in the United States.

Once the relief flight had arrived in Mexico, the donated food was turned over to a relief organization, Save the Children Fund, for distribution to the hungry. While several young American volunteers unpacked the boxes, they noticed that the packages had expired dates. A huge group of starving Mexicans was waiting for the packages while a correspondent of a television network waited to broadcast the event in the United States. What was broadcast instead was news of the expired dates on the donated food.

### **For Discussion**

Since Mexico has weak laws on food dates and the food was still edible, do you think Greengrocers acted in a socially responsible manner? Explain.

If you were the president of Greengrocers, how would you explain your conduct now that the details of the donation were revealed?

Suggest some ways by which Greengrocers can discourage unethical conduct by its employees in the future.