

SPECIALTY SEAFOODS

Specialty seafoods essentially represent a new seafood format in South Florida, as opposed to value-added seafoods which consist of established seafood items which have been modified in cut, shape, coating and packaging to improve handling, presentation, profitability and value to end-users and consumers. Traditionally, sturgeon caviars and smoked salmon have been the core of the specialty seafood category, practically staples of gourmet food. Today, these delicacies maintain dominance, but, have recently been joined by an array of seafoods unknown to the South Florida market. New specialty seafoods include pâtés, terrines, galantines and mousses for the up-scale markets; salmon ham, hot dogs and sausages for the daily fare; seafood soups and sauces to grace the meal; and a variety of other smoked seafoods in large demand by the South Florida consumer market.

Seafood pâtés, mousses, terrines and galantines are gaining a larger presence in the South Florida seafood market, again as evidenced at the Boston International Seafood Show and Seafare of the Americas in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Mouth-watering pâtés can be found featuring shrimp with baby carrots, parfait lobster with Grand Marnier, scallops with fresh mushrooms, and mousseline of smoked salmon. Galantines appeared highlighting trout stuffed with whitefish, cream cheese and spinach; salmon stuffed with whitefish, cream cheese and vegetables; and a wide variety of other species including shrimp, crab, and lobster tastefully prepared with various herbs and spices.

Another example of a successful specialty seafood product in the South Florida market is salmon ham, and salmon sausage. With vastly reduced fat content (1-5%), salmon ham is as convenient as regular ham and can be used in all the same applications. Other salmon products making headway in the South Florida consumer market are salmon pepperoni and hot sticks, salmon hot dogs, mild and hot salmon breakfast sausage, and salmon patties in a variety of flavours. "Seafood as an ingredient", is also expanding usage across the South Florida market, with various seafood species being put to imaginative uses by small-sized companies willing to experiment with new taste combinations. Seafood is used as a flavouring for a number of products including soups, sauces, dips, pasta, seasonings and salad dressings.

Specialty seafoods add excitement to menus and retail counters in South Florida. Consumers are offered a wide range of products that are out of the ordinary, as a personal treat or for entertaining. South Florida consumers are generally receptive to brand name products which are backed by proven quality. Canadian specialty seafoods exporters considering the South Florida market should be creative, consistent, and quality-conscious when developing new products. However, successful research, development, and marketing of specialty seafoods can increase sales to the South Florida fish and seafood market and lead to an enhanced network of buyers for the Caribbean region.

Health consciousness has also influenced specialty seafood products over the past few years. Some gourmet breadcrumb seafood is now pre-browned in canola oil. Other appetizers to hit the "health circuit" include seafood chili, cheese crab cakes, oriental shrimp bites, and fish nuggets. One particularly successful product to enter the South Florida market is a nine pound deli-style tuna loaf for retail and foodservice establishments, and is made with yellowfin tuna and seasonings, in regular or naturally smoked flavours. The tuna loaf is fully cooked and ready to slice for sandwiches or for appetizers with crackers or toast points. Made from fresh-frozen tuna, the product is virtually fat free, very low in cholesterol, and provides a health option to fat-laden snack alternatives.

One prominent South Florida retailer sells chef-prepared, ready-to-heat entrées, including orange roughy Francaise, an egg-washed fillet dredged in seasoned flour; blackened catfish; swordfish Francaise; and calamari salad with vegetables and olives, dressed in vinaigrette. Stuffed clams and seafood-stuffed mushroom appetizers are also very popular with South Florida consumers. Many South Florida retailers buy upscale specialty seafoods and tailor the products to the demographics of individual stores, which range from blue collar, to ethnic, to gourmet. The company looks closely at quality, convenience, perceived value and affordability, because price point still attracts large volumes of customers.