

Known for its fine cuisine and diverse cultural makeup, Belgium presents an ideal, albeit challenging, test market. With a population of 10 million, the country is a good size for Canadian food exporters looking to penetrate the

are discerning food consumers who demand high quality from a wide variety of products. For convenience and competitive prices, consumers shop at local supermarkets and hypermarkets which carry both food and soft/hard non-food items.

are often destined not only for the Belgian retail market but also for other European markets.

Canadian food exporters can take advantage of a host of distribution channels in Belgium, including retail chains, cash and carry, wholesale purchasing groups, franchises and industry associations. Using these various channels simultaneously is often the most successful method of penetrating the Belgian food market. Most of the dominant retail chains in Belgium are vertically integrated and active in all stages of the distribution process.

Imports account for some 30% of the Belgian food market, making it a viable destination for Canadian food products. The most promising opportunities are in current food trends (e.g. private label, health and organic foods), and Canadian specialty products (e.g. wild rice, specialty meats, confectionery goods). Top agri-food imports from Canada include oilseeds, cereals and vegetables, with beverages, prepared foods, and specialty products on the rise.

For more information about the Belgian agri-food market, consult the market study at www.infoexport.gc.ca/be or contact Francis Keymolen, Canadian Embassy, Brussels, fax: (011-322) 741-0616, e-mail: francis.keymolen@dfait-maeci.gc.ca *

Market profile

Agri-food products in Belgium

greater European market. Nestled between France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the North Sea, Belgium is an excellent centre for trade as well as a gateway to northwestern Europe. With one of the best transportation systems in Europe, cost-effective transportation can be provided to 300 million consumers in less than 48 hours.

While Belgium is recognized as one of the best test markets in Europe, its cultural diversity also presents one of the most challenging environments. As both Germanic and Latin business practices are common throughout the country, it is highly recommended that Belgian business partners possess the knowledge and skills required to be able to effectively cover the different regions of Belgium. Sales and marketing experience in Belgium will prove invaluable for future exports to other European Union (EU) countries. It is widely accepted that if a product can be successfully launched in Belgium, it stands a good chance of being successful throughout the European Union.

Europe's culinary capital

Along with having the highest disposable incomes in the EU, Belgians

In addition to these stores, Belgium has many specialty shops and markets. Most communities have at least one bakery, delicatessen, butcher shop, and a host of other stores specializing in fresh produce, seafood, wine, cheese and chocolate.

With some 35,000 restaurants and pubs of varying ethnicity, Belgians also have a passion for dining out, and Belgian cuisine ranks among the finest in Europe. Restaurants also offer patrons an opportunity to try unique foods not found in retail outlets. Belgians are considered to be more willing to try and accept new food items than other Europeans. Canadian exporters, for example, have been successful by offering specialty meats such as bison.

Consumption patterns differ significantly throughout Belgium's various regions with their diverse cultural characteristics. For example, the tastes and preferences of southern Belgium's predominantly French population tend to reflect those found in France, while people from Flanders tend to be more influenced by the Netherlands.

Distribution channels abound

Due to Belgium's central European location and its thriving food processing industry, food imports



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