

The government has privatized most of its former holdings in the fish distribution business. In late 1996 it was still trying to sell Ocean Garden, a major seafood distribution operation. This was the third time that Ocean Garden was put up for sale; the first two rounds of bidding did not produce an offer that was satisfactory to the government. The *Cámara Nacional de la Industria Pesquera (Canainpes)*, National Fishing Industry Association, has acted to bring together a consortium of Mexican companies to bid on this sale. Ocean Garden is a major exporter of Mexican seafood products. In particular, it exports shrimp, lobster and abalone to Japan and Korea, and it is working with the Japanese to develop new products for that market through aquaculture. There is concern that if the company falls into foreign hands, Mexican exports may suffer.

TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Product exports are limited mainly to niche markets, some of which are considered saturated, but there are interesting opportunities for the export of Canadian technology through joint ventures.

Considering that Mexico has substantial fishery resources, seafood is a relatively small part of the national diet. Per capita consumption is about 9 kilograms. This has been attributed to a lack of promotional efforts on behalf of both the public and private sectors, and also to poor distribution and storage facilities which have historically made fish expensive and kept quality low.

The largest consumption levels are in central Mexico including the Federal District, Cuernavaca, Puebla, Toluca and Querétaro. This includes processed fish, however, and the largest consumption of fresh fish is on the coasts. The government has been working with the industry to develop promotion programs to increase domestic consumption.

CANNED PRODUCTS

Traditionally, sardine and tuna have been the most popular canned fish products. Recently, consumption of sardine has fallen because prices of tuna have been low. Concerns about cholera infection, combined with a surplus of tuna because of the American embargo on Mexican tuna have depressed demand. Mexican production of tuna is strong and domestic prices are lower than for tuna from Thailand, which is considered the world leader.