

VALUE-ADDED SEAFOODS

Predominantly emanating from the increased restaurant activity of the 1980's, seafood consumers became accustomed to seafood dishes prepared with a dozen or more chef-driven ingredients, and mouth-watering flavours. However, the recession in the early 1990's has reduced disposable income available for eating out, and as a result people are eating less at restaurants, but still crave great tasting seafood dishes. Enter the convenience of value-added seafood which comes ready to fry, sauté, bake or steam in minutes; as seen at both the Boston International Seafood Show, and Seafare International in Long Beach, California. Pre-portioned servings, and marinated fillets have helped U.S. consumers compensate for lost time and money.

In addition, financial and economic difficulties have faced the retail and foodservice sectors of the U.S. economy, hence owners and managers have been forced to cut costs while compensating for a general reduction in the number of employees. The obvious trend for retail and foodservice is value-added seafood, as it provides expertly prepared fillets and steaks, breaded calamari rings and oysters, marinated or sauced, and ready to grill, bake, fry, or mix in a fresh salad.

The United States market for value-added food products is extremely competitive and increasingly more price conscious. Each calendar year, approximately 12,000 new food products are introduced into the U.S. market, but only a small portion survive on the shelf any length of time. Certain value-added fish and seafood products have made serious inroads to the U.S. market. Many of those products are described below.

Frozen seafood patties, known as "seafood burgers", with ingredients including salmon, tuna, catfish and surimi, are very popular with U.S. consumers. Seafood burgers are being purchased by quality-oriented cruise lines, restaurant chains, institutions, wholesale food distributors, and retail grocers. Another popular value-added seafood item to hit the market is the seafood dinner kit, sold largely to restaurants. Varieties of seafood dinner kits include: salmon teriyaki; Chilean sea bass Vera Cruz, with lime, red pepper and vegetables; Mahi-Mahi marinated with teriyaki and packed with butter; and Sake Kasu, a sea bass fillet in a Japanese marinade.

Other firms package cultivated black tiger or white shrimp in a stir fry with oil, pea pods, bamboo shoots and carrots, plus a seasoning packet; or lemon pepper shrimp and sweet and sour shrimp with pineapple, bell peppers and onions. A very successful foreign supplier to the U.S. market offers six prepared-seafood entrées for retailers, cruise lines, restaurant chains and food clubs. These include Cod Monterey, an 8 oz. cod portion with puff pastry, cheddar cheese and vegetables; Gulf Snapper Imperial with breadcrumbs, cheese, shrimp and crab; Shrimp Galaxy; Sole Supreme, a sole fillet rolled and stuffed with shrimp filling; Salmon Florentine; and Oreo Dory Florentine, with spinach, jack and parmesan cheeses and shrimp.

Catfish has become increasingly popular with U.S. consumers prompting the emergence of new products such as catfish fillets in eye-opening Caribbean-style and Mexican marinades. The new catfish is offered in a variety of seasonings, breadings and packaging targeted at consumers, including a growing array of grill-ready marinated products. Value-added catfish products are currently big sellers to major retailers, chain restaurants, and food distributors.