

Under-developed domestic consumer demand, aggravated by the emphasis of the major producers on the export markets as their first priority, has hindered the growth of domestic distribution and sales of freshwater fish.

Over the past few years, the major food chains have initiated special merchandising and promotional efforts to increase their sales of fish. It is indeed encouraging to note that of late stronger interest in merchandizing and promotion of fish, particularly fresh fish are becoming evident.

In most supermarkets, the fresh fish operations are handled by the meat departments. It is, however, felt that this may not be appropriate as there are inherent differences between the merchandising of meat and that of fish. Some fish specialists suggest that fish sales at the retail level should be handled by the fresh produce department. In their view, there are similarities between the merchandising of fish and fresh produce.

3.1.1 Distribution Channels for the Western Region's Production

The FFMC mainly markets fish in the Western Region and in Central Canada. In British Columbia and east of Quebec, the FFMC products are by and large not competitive or not as saleable as salt water fishery products presumably due to the lack of consumer experience with freshwater fish.

In marketing its products in Western Canada, the FFMC mainly acts as a distributor moving fish to a network of wholesalers and brokers who, in turn, service the retail and food service trades in the major western cities. Outside the major cities of the Western Region, the FFMC is the main supplier of freshwater fish to the retail and food service markets. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, however, changes were recently made to the intra-provincial fish marketing regulations making it possible for fishermen to sell their product direct to intra-provincial retail and food service outlets. Previously, fishermen could sell their product only to the FFMC or directly to the end-consumer. This is still the case in Northwestern Ontario and to some extent in the NWT and Manitoba.⁽¹⁾ The changes in Alberta were the result of a study showing that there were undue constraints on the local Alberta market for freshwater fish. One of these was obviously the need to route the product to and from a central processing plant with the attendant transportation and overhead costs. Another was the considerable fluctuation in the availability and price of freshwater fish. As an export-oriented operation, the FFMC is constantly responding to market forces independent of local markets. This had apparently constrained many retail outlets from handling the product.⁽²⁾

In Central Canada, the FFMC relies on one particularly large wholesaler which distributes FFMC products in Ontario and Quebec. However, the marketing of FFMC products in these provinces is highly seasonal as the FFMC cannot compete with

⁽¹⁾ In the NWT, the FFMC on the recommendation of the Territorial government issues special dealer licences to permit intra-provincial sales from fishermen to commercial enterprises such as retail outlets, hotels and restaurants. In Manitoba, the FFMC also issues similar special dealer licences in remote areas.

⁽²⁾ Thorne, Stevenson & Kellog, *Evaluation of Fresh Freshwater Fish Processing and Marketing Opportunities Within Alberta*, November 1983, p. 14.