

As you might expect from a country with a low per capita consumption, consumers in the United States are not very sophisticated when it comes to seafood. Medical experts and nutrition counsellors urge people to eat more seafood, for the low cholesterol and omega-3 benefits, but only a relative few will change their eating habits because of health considerations. Seafood consumption in the United States is characterized by high-value species having an acceptable non-fishy taste, with whitefish predomination.

Marketing Challenges

The U.S. marketplace is full of opportunity as American consumers become more venturesome in their eating habits, as they generally have more disposable income to spend on higher-priced foods, as they become influenced by the "exotic" image of seafood. On the other hand, however, the issues of price, safety, availability and regulations all fall under the category of what we in marketing like to refer to as "challenges." The U.S. market is full of vagaries and inconsistencies at the moment. For every opportunity there are pitfalls, especially for the unwary. I propose to review the most important constraints under the following headings: supplies, price, convenience, safety, regulations and labelling.

Supplies - Quota reductions in Canada, Norway, Iceland and Denmark point to tight supplies of Atlantic groundfish species during 1989. As many U.S. buyers don't want to get on the cod roller-coasters again, they are continuing to look at whitefish alternatives. As an example, Long John Silver's, one of the largest buyers of cod, will be rolling out a new product this year made from Alaska pollock. This is Alaska pollock's entree into the big time on a national basis, and LJS is making this move purely on price -- to be able to offer their customers a full meal for under \$4.00.