

POST OBSERVATIONS

Market Strategy

Certain "traditional" Canadian products are already well established on the Italian market {Gaspè cure and "San Giovanni" salted cod, frozen pacific salmon for smoking, canned salmon}, but few others, with the exception of live lobsters and surimi, have significantly taken hold in the past decade. Along with the difficulties inherent in the above-mentioned fragmented and regionalized nature of the market, there are also the obvious language problems, the complexity and slowness of bureaucratic procedures, and the relative lack of effective legal and practical safeguards in doing business in Italy. Despite all this, however, considering what Italian consumers are willing to pay for good quality fish products, the rewards can be well worth the trouble.

There is little doubt that Canada will continue to be a long-term supplier of fish products to Europe. With the increasing unification of the European market, Canadian products currently sold only into northern Europe will be ever more readily available to the Italian market. Canadian fish plants are currently authorized to ship under EU certification, and Italian regulations are coming increasingly into line with those of the other Member States. There is little doubt that, at least from the official and bureaucratic standpoint, exporting to Italy will become increasingly easy.

Currently the normal, though by no means exclusive, entry pattern for new products is their introduction first into the French and German markets, and thence their movement down into northern Italy {where consumers are more "supermarket-oriented"} and their eventual spread southward. This has, of course, been facilitated by the fact that products nationalized in nearby EU member countries such as France or Germany can often more easily enter Italy than product shipped directly from Canada {especially in the case of processed frozen products}.

Promotional Approach

If a Canadian exporter is seriously interested in the Italian market, a visit to Italy is obviously a "must", and should ideally take place on the occasion of one of the major food fairs. Such events provide good opportunities not just to get an overview of the fish products sector as such, but to see it in the context of Italian food marketing overall. Here the potential exporter can not only meet personally with local producers, importers and distributors, but also gain an appreciation of the important visual aspects of Italian food preparation and packaging, as well as assess the possible need to tailor his product accordingly, both in terms of ingredients {additives} and packaging.

Participation in such fairs offers further advantages. Exporters should contact their local International Trade Centre {ITC} offices to see whether they qualify for government financial assistance {i.e. PEMD} which, in some cases, may be of significant importance. Finally, in view of the above-mentioned difficulties, new exporters are urged to consider working through brokers or exclusive agents, responsible for protecting their interests, and to be particularly cautious in negotiating payment conditions.