

Acadian Seaplants Limited (www.acadianseaplants.com) of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, has found an exclusive niche market in Japan for its cultivated seaweeds which it has been exporting to that country for over eight years now.

Nova Scotian seaweed a delicacy in Japan

A niche market worth cultivating

For a company engaged primarily in the cultivation, processing and development of value-added seaweed and seaweed-based products, it was no accident to target Japan where 15% of the Japanese diet is seaweed.

Market and product research key

"This is one of the facts we discovered during our extensive market research," says company President Louis Deveau. "We had one of our people spend six months in Japan, studying conditions and requirements for our products — with good assistance there from Canada's Trade Commissioner Service."

With confirmation that Japan was indeed looking for cultivated seaweed, Acadian's unique cultivated pink seaweed, called Aka Hana-nori, was first introduced to the Japanese food market in the mid-1990s. Based on its success, the company soon produced green (Ao Hana-nori) and the first-ever yellow (Kiku Hana-nori).

"As a matter of fact," recalls Deveau, "this first-ever yellow edible seaweed was introduced to the Japanese food market at the world famous trade fair FoodEx 2001 where Acadian Seaplants exhibited in the Canadian Pavilion. There again, we received good assistance from the Trade Commissioner Service at the Canadian Embassy in Tokyo which sent out invitations to food companies to visit our exhibit."

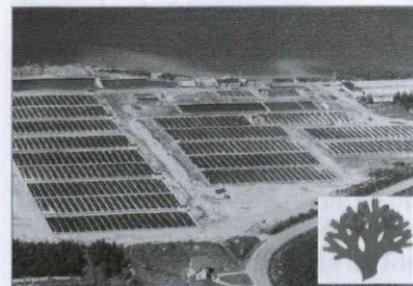
In addition to the time and effort

spent on market research, Acadian — it has been producing top quality marine plant products for over 25 years — has invested significantly in R&D to come up with its unique products. And research is ongoing to diversify its product lines.

Emphasis on quality

As a result, it has achieved worldwide distribution and recognition as a diversified manufacturer of innovative and top quality products.

Acadian's seaweeds are grown inland in outdoor growing ponds containing superpurified seawater, under quality-controlled conditions.



Aerial view of Acadian Seaplants' unique land-based cultivated seaweed operation. Inset: Aka Hana-nori.

"The strong emphasis on quality has paid off in so many ways," says Deveau proudly. "We received a Canada Export Award in 1996 and more recently the 2001 Canadian Innovation Award for Technology from the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters for our innovative cultivated seaweed food products."

Yet few Canadians have experienced the award-winning food. Little wonder since 98% of Acadian's products — which include feed additives, fertilizers, animal feed, ingredients for

health and beauty products and the brewing industry — are exported to over 65 countries, mainly the U.S.

"These unique seaweed food products from Canada have met with exceptional Japanese market acceptance and demand," explains Hiroki Nakamoto, the company's Sales and Marketing Manager - Food Division. "As a matter of fact, when it comes to demand, we sell absolutely everything we can grow to Japan."

The products are sold for use in retail outlets, restaurants, hotels, deli operations and institutional food services (hospitals, universities). Uses range from seaweed salads to sashimi garnishes and soup ingredients.

Ingredients for success

Nakamoto, who makes frequent trips to Japan, calling on customers and investigating new markets, is also quick to emphasize quality. "When it comes to selling products abroad, especially food, it has to be of the highest quality," he insists. "Other ingredients include good market research, strong customer relations, understanding market structures and regulations, and specific requirements such as food certifications."

He acknowledges, of course, that this is all based on a thorough understanding of the country. That is where officers of the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service in target countries can also help.

"Last but not least, having someone who knows the local language is very important," he notes with a smile. "In my case, being of Japanese origin, it is obviously much easier to make a good bridge between the target market and my company."

What better proof than Acadian's resounding success in Japan.

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