

NEW PRODUCTS

In France new food products are very actively marketed and an extensive range and variety of products are readily available. New products that have recently made their appearance on the French market are vacuum-packed fresh fish, surimi in all forms (10,000 tonnes were imported in 1992), and fresh and dried seaweed.

Generally speaking, the French are fond of elaborate dishes, are prepared to pay high prices for their food, and take time over and enjoy their meals. They have a greater interest in high-quality food than Canadian consumers. It should also be noted that France is one of the countries where people are most concerned about the appearance and presentation of the food products being offered to the consumer.

DISTRIBUTION

The food product distribution system has undergone far-reaching changes in recent years. The large-scale distributors or supermarket chains also known as "GMS" ("grandes et moyennes surfaces") play a leading role in the sale of food products -- 51% of sales occur in the hypermarkets (+ 2500 m²) and the supermarkets (400 - 2500 m²).

According to recent information, in fresh and frozen fish products, the hypermarkets and supermarkets have over 40% of the sales, as opposed to 29.7% for the fish shops, 20.5% for the markets and 9.4% for other distribution channels. In some market segments such as deep-frozen or smoked products, the GMSs have close to 60%. The traditional fish shops, which sell mainly fresh fish, are losing ground to the GMSs. Most supermarkets contain a specialty shop for fresh fish, crustaceans and molluscs; refrigerator cases filled with fresh prepared dishes and smoked fish; and freezer chests of frozen products, including fish fillets, crustaceans and frozen prepared dishes.

A noteworthy development in the policy of the GMSs is the growing number of loss leaders. Frozen and especially live lobster, along with smoked salmon, have become year-end loss leaders, and their prices have accordingly been "squeezed."

RESTAURANTS

The "conventional" restaurant sector constitutes an attractive outlet for fresh products. Nearly all restaurants have a number of fish dishes on the menu, based on such species as salmon, monkfish and cod. Specialized catering firms supply them with high-quality deep-frozen products, and the major agri-food firms market "professional" lines of extremely high-quality products such as frozen sauces, which are seldom available to the consumer at the retail level.

The category of institutional and corporate food services, which includes factory canteens, school cafeterias and the like, is more extensively developed in France than in Canada. This sector constitutes an attractive outlet for products at the middle and low end of the market. A new development in this more industrial type of food service is the assembly-line kitchen, where vacuum-cooked dishes are prepared for large numbers of restaurant services which have only to heat and serve.

Restaurant chains are relatively underdeveloped. Such as they are, they tend to offer meat products for the low end of the market, rather than fish and seafood. However, this situation is changing as large distribution and fast-food chains begin to follow the trend.