

DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

The food distribution system has changed significantly in recent years. In addition to the traditional specialized fish stores selling essentially fresh fish (which are in decline), the "large distribution" (supermarket chains) now play a leading role in food sales generally (51% of sales in superstores [$> 2,500 \text{ m}^2$] and supermarkets [400 - 2,500 m^2]) as well as fresh and frozen fish products.

Canadian companies can elect to market their products in three ways: sales to a supplier sometimes known as an importer, sales through an agent, or direct sales to producers or central purchasing centers.

Suppliers are companies which negotiate purchases of merchandise for resale to consumers, central purchasers or independent supermarkets. Agents act as suppliers but work on commission or for payment fixed in advance. Producers are primarily interested in supplying the French or European market. They could be direct buyers or purchase from suppliers or agents.

Central purchasing centers developed with the growth of large-volume distribution and specialty stores (frozen food centers, diet stores). However, they have a small role in relation to supplying restaurant chains which are to date not well developed in the fish product sector.

Packaged fish products, such as frozen salmon and frozen lobster sticks ("popsicles"), and live lobster for consumption at the end of the year, are often sold directly or through a single intermediary involved in importation. Negotiating with the powerful central purchasing centers is always difficult. Caution is advised.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXPORTERS

In the case of frozen products, goods must be accompanied by a health certificate, include the date of freezing and a "best before date". The labelling of products at the retail level is subject to very strict regulations which differ from Canadian practices. Exporters must comply with them. Use of the metric system is mandatory.

Specific regulations apply to scallops, imported live shellfish and sea-urchins, minced fish meat and surimi, prepared meals and processed fish generally.

Success in selling to France, particularly to the supermarkets and superstores, generally requires both a presence in the large food shows (SIAL and ANUGA) and frequent visits to buyers and distributors.

In addition to the favourable prospects for those species already mentioned (except salmon), the further development of Canadian exports is likely to be based upon the production of species which have limited market demand in Canada but are appreciated in France (monkfish, dogfish, skate).