

Farmed versus Wild

Almost all of the importers interviewed reported that they regarded farmed salmon as being inferior to wild salmon. The consumer's perception, in the opinion of the trade, is somewhat divided. It is believed that since the majority of Japanese consumers are not familiar with farmed salmon, they have not formulated a preference either way. On the other hand, informed consumers are expected to view farmed salmon as inferior when compared with wild salmon. This is because the size and quality of Japanese farmed Coho salmon has been inferior to that of wild salmon sold in Japan.

Almost all of the importers interviewed had a favourable opinion of the quality of B.C. wild salmon. They believed that their opinion is shared by those Japanese consumers who are familiar with B.C. salmon. It is interesting to note, however, that almost two-thirds of surveyed companies believe most Japanese consumers do not know B.C. wild salmon.

Prices

Over two-thirds of respondents to the industry questionnaire believed that farmed salmon prices should be lower than those of wild salmon. The lower prices should prevail for frozen or fresh salmon and for all species — Atlantic, King or Coho. They expect this lower price differential to continue in the foreseeable future.

Sources of Imported Farmed Salmon

Approximately two-thirds of the respondents currently import farmed salmon from more than one country. Besides Canada, major exporters are the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland), New Zealand, Australia and Chile. The country with the largest number of exporters is Norway, with 11, followed by Canada, with 8, and Denmark, with 6.

Almost all respondents expressed strong interest in importing both fresh and frozen farmed Coho and King salmon from British Columbia.

Purchasing Considerations

The most important purchasing considerations for the importers were price, quality and meat colour. Security of supply and country of origin were the least important considerations.

4 Recommendations for Successful Exporting

The interviewed companies were asked how B.C. farmed salmon producers might effectively export to Japan. Their comments fell into three categories:

- Overview of the Japanese Market;
- Supply Delivery and Price; and
- Colour, Size and Quality.

Overview of the Japanese Market

Salmon, which is a favourite fish of Japanese consumers, has become increasingly popular as farmed salmon has become more plentiful and more economical. However, importers are concerned that unless demand keeps pace with supply, the current oversupply situation threatens the future of the industry. Some form of international co-operation to regulate supply might be sought to stabilize farmed salmon prices.

Currently, in Japan, it is very much a buyer's market. There is strong competition among producers on the basis of price, quality, service, size and even fish presentation or dressing. The Japanese consumer is very discriminating and not only expects, but demands high standards.

Canadian exporters of farmed salmon will get strong competition from European producers who have increased their efforts to export their Atlantic farmed salmon to Japan. The major foreign competition for Canadian producers of farmed Coho and King salmon comes from Chilean and Norwegian producers.

Several different ways were suggested for Canadian producers to compete with foreign competition. Most importers stressed the need for a strong commitment to promotion and the use of advertising to better differentiate B.C. farmed salmon on the basis of quality, size and colour. From a commercial point of view, every importer stressed the importance of producers maintaining stable but competitive prices and providing regular delivery.