TIPS ON APPROACHING THE SWISS MARKET

Swiss fish production is limited and only covers 9 percent of total consumption. Per capita fish and fish products consumption is 7.7 kilograms per year. In 1990, imports of fish, crustaceans and molluscs totalled 30,884 metric tonnes.

Switzerland's high standard of living and a large influx of tourists offer excellent potential for expanding sales of high-value fish products. The Swiss import over 90 percent of their seafood and most consumption is of high-value products. The only Swiss domestic harvest that is similar to Canadian seafood exports is perch. Yellow lake perch from the Great Lakes, especially Lake Erie, is considered by the Swiss as a good and reliable substitute for European perch. Most potential lies with freshwater species and with Pacific salmon. Chum salmon accounts for 90 percent of Swiss salmon imports. The Swiss prefer to import fresh or frozen and smoke their own in traditional ways. Generally, there is a reluctance by households to try new species, so restaurants can play an important role in increasing consumer awareness.

Swiss importers are quite prepared to enter into exclusive agency agreements. They also accept direct sales with the understanding that the Canadian exporter is reliable and can guarantee a continuous supply allowing the Swiss importer to satisfy the requirements of his clientele. There are no barriers with respect to the importation of fresh and frozen fish. Most species are imported duty free by licensed Swiss importers. A VAT tax of 4 SFr per 100 kilograms gross weight is applicable. However, as of January 1989 a "public health certificate for the importation of fish preparations, crustaceans, molluscs, sea urchins and products thereof" (certificat de salubrite) is required.

The Swiss emphasize quality and service above all. For example, failure to deliver on a pre-arranged date will be seen by the Swiss as a major obstacle to further dealings. One problem in the past has been that Canadian seafood exporters have wanted to sell large quantities, while the Swiss tend to like to start small and build sales over a period of time. The Swiss will purchase on a trial basis and if they are satisfied, more orders will follow. The prospects in this market are good if Canadian exporters are prepared to commit to a long-range strategy and emphasize the best in quality and service.