

CHICAGO

Fish consumption in the United States is usually limited to the species indigenous to a particular region, but because Chicago can easily receive fish products from all parts of the world (O'Hare International Airport is #1 for direct flights), the midwest enjoys the greatest/broadest "variety" of ocean, native, freshwater and farm raised products in the country. Because fresh fish, which is in great demand, can be transported quickly and easily to other midwestern states (a population base of 47 million), it is little wonder that Chicago has been deemed the "Seafood Capital of the Nation".

Chicago is very receptive to Canadian fish products. Every species available to us from Canada is already being purchased and marketed in the midwest. Accordingly, the Chicago fish community reports that speed is of the essence in ensuring choice goods; even the remotest suppliers can replenish inventories in less than a day, and any Canadian who cannot compete on those terms will be at a definite disadvantage here. It is also worth noting that a "good old boy" attitude toward Canadian fish suppliers exists here; Canadians are perceived as great, fair-minded people with quality products. Through the Consulate, interested fish sellers can easily make contacts with appropriate buyers.

Recent meetings with well established middlemen (including a frozen fish distributor, a specialty seafoods distributor, and a broker for fresh and frozen fish), disclosed the fact that the overall sales of Canadian fish products are hampered mostly by supply, not demand or price. This was confirmed during a meeting with the world's largest wholesaler of fresh fish, The Chicago Fish House, when the Executive Vice President said they alone could buy everything that Canada produces. Conflicting viewpoints emerge on fresh vs. frozen products. Major brokers and distributors for frozen argue that frozen products generate more volume due to their popularity in supermarkets and institutions. Representatives of the fresh products impart just the opposite. Despite this, the consensus of opinion remains the same: seafood consumption has increased dramatically in recent years and the industry as a whole is projecting sales increases of 5% per year over the next 3-6 years.

Foodservice (hotels, restaurants, schools, hospitals, etc.) demand for high quality seafood is increasing. Alone, Chicago Fish House ships 35 million lbs of seafood a year to hotels, supermarkets, clubs, restaurants, and other wholesalers in 38 states as well as to several foreign countries. Volume products include cod, shrimp, salmon and even surimi which is fast becoming a product in and of itself. The age of hypermarkets is in full swing in the midwest and the demand at retail is also increasing.