

SEAFOOD MARKET IN BRIEF

Chinese consumers clearly prefer fresh fish in their diets, and consume significant amounts of dried seafood products such as shark fin, squid, shrimp, geoduck, abalone and oysters. Chinese citizens are extremely discerning where fish and seafood products are concerned and continue to demand products with consistent quality. Chinese residents incorporate a wide variety of seafood products in their diets. Some of the more popular species which are consumed on a regular basis include: prawns/shrimp, shark fins, squid, octopus, cuttle fish, scallops, abalone, geoduck, lobster, crab, sea cucumber, capelin, oysters, and a number of different fish fillets, crustaceans and molluscs.

The average Chinese consumer purchases fresh fish at open or wet markets largely because frozen fish cannot be favourably compared to the fresh product. In addition, there is a general lack of refrigeration across China, both at the corporate and consumer levels and this is a very limiting factor; and, consumer purchasing power cannot support the purchase of high quality, high priced frozen imports.

Frozen seafood products are slowly making inroads into the Chinese consumer markets, partially influenced by increased access to imported products. Hotels concentrated in the major centres are important users of high-value frozen seafood products, including demand for white-fish fillets, lobster, salmon and scallops. These establishments are frequented by Chinese residents on expense accounts, and tourists.

Demand for food products in general is expected to increase because of the growth in the purchasing power of the upper and upper-middle class in the major cities and special economic zones. As the Chinese economy opens up more to international seafood imports, Canadian fish and seafood exporters are well positioned to capture market share within the increased sales. Other significant niche marketing opportunities are developing in the airline catering sector and the growing fast food and beverage sectors. Popular species of fish found within the increases are white pomfret, spanish mackerel, golden snapper, hard tail, coral fish, sea bream, dorab, sea bass and grouper.

Chinese housewives in rural areas conduct most of their shopping at state-owned stores and supermarkets. Many view the free markets as higher in price, but offer a higher degree of quality and there is much more choice of seafood products and species. Free markets are often an adventure in open sacks of multi-coloured aromatic spices, dried fish and shellfish of all descriptions. Much of the seafood comes from all over the globe, including tubs of fresh-looking squid which are caught and dried in Argentina, but then revived to near freshness in China by the store owner with a mixture of water and alkali. Many merchants make trips of over 1,000 kilometres to the coasts once a month to bring back supplies of dried shellfish, prawns, shrimp and other fish products.

ROCK OYSTERS

Rock oysters were introduced to the Chinese market during the 1980's. Sales have increased over the years, and today Canada is one of the largest suppliers to the market. Demand is expected to increase as the product is gaining popularity in buffet dinners and through sales to hotels and the catering trade.