

## The Japanese Consumer

Japanese consumers are among the most demanding in the world in terms of product quality. Consumer demands have acted to encourage manufacturers to upgrade their products in the processed sector as evidenced by the emphasis being placed by the major processors on "home-made" products, such as roast ham and an extension of this concept into sausage and wiener products as well.

Product appearance is highly valued by consumers and therefore packages must be of high quality. Food products must not only be fresh but look fresh and food packages must not impart a smell or taste to the food.

Packaging is of the utmost importance in presenting products for sale in Japan. The Japanese consider the appearance of the package as an indication of the care and the quality that has gone into the product. If the initial presentation is poor, to the Japanese, it will suggest that it is a poor product.

Traditional colours of red, orange and yellow for food packaging containers are well established. However, black and gold are gaining in popularity.

Consumers tend to shop almost daily to obtain fresh foods. They also tend to buy smaller quantities to fit into their limited storage space in the home as well as to cater to their wish for variety in their daily diet. This characteristic demands that package sizes must be smaller than the average size offered to consumers in the Canadian domestic market.

It is, however, important to acknowledge that price is still an important factor when the consumer is making the choice between like products.

Daily shopping leaves the Japanese with a consciousness of prices and price changes that may not hold true to the same degree for Canadian consumers.

Generally, Japanese consumers of processed foods prefer mild flavours. Salt intake has dropped steadily in Japan as people have become concerned with salt-related health problems. Growing concern with health has also created an increase in demand for low calorie and health foods.

Finally, it is necessary to recognize there are taste differences and preferences between localities, and major manufacturers of processed meats regularly find their products must be seasoned in a number of ways to succeed in different locations.

## 3 Legal Requirements for Food and Additives

### Specifications of Meat Products Composition

- Meat products shall be coliform group negative.
- Meat products shall not contain more than 0.07 g nitrites per 1 kg.
- Dried meat products shall have a water activity not more than 0.86.
- Non-heated products shall have a water activity not more than 0.94.

### Standards of Manufacture

General standards are:

- Meat ingredients used must be fresh and low in bacterial count.
- Frozen meats must be defrosted in a sanitary location and any water used must be potable running water.
- Meat must be kept in sanitary and readily cleanable, impermeable containers made of metal, plastic, etc.
- Any sugar, starch and seasoning used for manufacture must have not more than 1 000 heat resistant bacteria (spore-forming count) in total per 1 g.
- Clean, readily cleanable and sterilizable machinery and equipment must be used.

Individual standards for non-heated products are:

- Pork used for processing must be cooled to 4°C within 24 hours of slaughter and held at not more than 4°C. It must not have a pH of more than 6.0.
- Defrosting of frozen meat ingredients must be done so that the meat temperature does not exceed 10°C.
- During meat trimming the temperature of the meat must not exceed 10°C.
- Curing of meat shall be performed by the dry, immersion or injection methods. If injection is used, it must be done manually using the "one needle injection method." The temperature of the meat must not exceed 5°C so that the water activity is not more than 0.96.