

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.

An increasing amount of fish and seafood in the midwest is being raised through aquaculture. In the near future, it is anticipated that most of the fish and seafood consumed will be just as much a domestic farm product as our other primary protein sources (chicken, beef, pork). Aquaculture's popularity stems from a variety of factors: continuity of supply (a year round rather than seasonal alternatives to depleting the natural resources while satisfying protein needs of the population); consumer confidence in "quality" generated from local, pollution free waters; and controlled production resulting in stabilized prices. With continued improvements in technology and delivery systems, Chicago's wholesalers will not only be able to routinely distribute familiar species such as tuna and trout, but impressive ones such as hoki, high brow snapper, orange roughy, leather jacket, painted sweetlips and dozens of other unusual varieties. In a 12-state territory centered around Chicago (the transportation hub of the nation) about 200 operations exist with significant additions forecasted. Presently, 8 percent of the fish consumed in the United States is the product of aquaculture. Per capita seafood consumption now stands at 15.9 lbs per year, up almost a full pound from 1988. In less than 10 years that figure is expected to rise to a substantial 20 lbs per year.

According to local sources, the need to capitalize on "who we are and what we stand for" is our greatest challenge. It is a well known fact in the local trade arena that Canada has stringent inspection rules and that those standards are enforced to the letter of the law. Unfortunately, this "integrity" factor never reaches the ultimate consumer. Point of origin and quality assurance are ignored in the promotion, marketing and merchandising of Canadian fish. It has been suggested that stickers denoting "quality" (perhaps red maple leaves) and identification tags prominently displayed on all fish types, all packaging (master cartons and individual pieces), and all promotional material endorsing "inspected and passed by...." and "product of Canada" would formalize a favourable climate for creating consumer awareness, enhancing acceptance, fostering demand and generating ultimate consumer sales. In general, all the above comments provide a clear message to Canadian seafood exporters, "Chicago offers great opportunities for Canadian fish suppliers".