

Switzerland may be a small country, but it has a large appetite for imported agri-foods — the agri-food import market alone is worth an estimated 8.2 billion Swiss francs annually, almost 75% of which originates from EU countries. With only 1.2% coming from Canadian sources, it's safe to say that Canada has ample room to grow in the Swiss agri-food market.

Retail food structure

With a joint market share of 65%, Migros and Coop dominate the Swiss retail food market, estimated to be worth 40 billion Swiss francs each year. The two companies, headquartered in Zurich (Migros) and Basel (Coop), sell both brand name and private label products, as well as non-food items. However, Migros has traditionally favoured private label products, which offers an opportunity for Canadian companies with expertise in this area. As well, Switzerland has a considerable number of specialty and delicatessen food importers and distributors.

Opportunities

Although Swiss import duties range between 5% and 20% on certain products, the agri-food market in Switzerland is basically open to imports from around the world.

Canadian products most likely to make new inroads include niche, natural and specialty-type products with a high value-added component.

Market profile

Agri-food in Switzerland

Demand continues for the traditional Canadian food products such as durum wheat, pulses, fish and seafood, maple products, horse meat, oilseeds, soya beans, seeds, and pet food. Canadian whisky and beer are well accepted in Switzerland, while wines from Ontario and British Columbia have so far made only a small dent in the import market.

To become eligible to export meat to Switzerland, the exporter's plant must be on the Swiss and the European Union's lists of approved meat-exporting establishments, and the products should be free of hormones.

Canadian agri-food exporters should be aware of the Swiss resistance to genetically modified organism (GMO) products; a strong demand

for non-GMO products is predicted for the foreseeable future.

Overcoming challenges

The main constraint is not so much the existence of regulatory barriers, as it is a lack of awareness for agri-food consumer products from Canada. The Swiss market for imported consumer food is so dominated by products from the EU, from the United States, and, increasingly by a large variety of ethnic foodstuffs, that it is not easy for Canada to maintain, let alone increase, its small market share.

Useful Web sites

- Swiss Federal Office of Agriculture
Web site: www.blw.admin.ch
- Swiss Farmers Association
Web site: www.bauernverband.ch
- Swiss agriculture sector information
Web site: www.landwirtschaft.ch
- Swiss Federal Office of Public Health
Web site: www.admin.ch/bag
- Association of Swiss Organic Agriculture Organizations
Web site: www.bio-suisse.ch
- Swiss Federal Veterinary Office
Web site: www.bvet.admin.ch

For more information, contact Werner Naef, Commercial Officer, Canadian Embassy, Berne, tel.: (011-41-31) 357-3206, fax: (011-41-31) 357-3210, e-mail: werner.naef@dfait-maeci.gc.ca Web site: www.canada-ambassade.ch or www.infoexport.gc.ca/ch *

The Dutch food retail market

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PLMA Show. It is a great venue to assess the market, especially in Europe, although you need to be a PLMA member to exhibit. Here again, however, it will be necessary to consider setting up some sort of central distribution if you are to accommodate the requirements of the supermarket buyers, who potentially would be located in markets all over Europe.

For further information regarding opportunities and conditions of

participation in PLMA, contact Gilbert Arnold, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, fax: (519) 837-9782, e-mail: arnoldg@em.agr.ca

If you are interested in exploring the Dutch grocery market further, contact Frits W. Zechner, Commercial Officer, Canadian Embassy, The Hague, tel.: (011-31-70) 311-1665, fax: (011-31-70) 311-1682, e-mail: frits.zechner@dfait-maeci.gc.ca Web site: www.ocanada.nl *