

United States Lobster Product Exports

<i>Product</i>	1992	1992	1993	1993
	<i>MT</i>	<i>US\$,000</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>US\$,000</i>
American lobster, fresh or frozen	9,172	93,230	8,966	87,773
Spiny lobster, fresh or frozen	766	10,245	550	7,589
Lobster meat	102	895	78	522
Canned lobster products	11	176	—	—
Total U.S. Lobster Exports	10,051	104,546	9,594	95,884

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. NOTE: Exports do not include lobster ready meals, or specialty lobster products.

United States imports of lobster totalled 28,880 MT in 1993, valued at US\$416.1 million, a decrease from 29,745 MT in 1992 {US\$483.6 million}. Imports of fresh or frozen lobster were 28,531 MT valued at US\$408.9 million. Leading the way were U.S. imports of spiny lobster which equalled 10,598 MT valued at US\$215.2 million, a decrease from 11,773 Mt and US\$275.6 million in 1992 {21.9 percent by value}.

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Spiny lobster, fresh or frozen	11,773	275,553	10,598	215,233
American lobster, fresh or frozen	15,452	156,653	16,224	163,334
Lobster meat	2,204	44,768	1,709	30,350
Canned lobster products	316	6,625	349	7,114
Total U.S. Lobster Imports	29,745	483,599	28,880	416,031

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce. NOTE: Imports do not include lobster ready meals, or specialty lobster products.

Most American restaurants and supermarkets purchase 100 to 500 pounds of live lobster on a weekly basis, with some buyers for multiple unit chains purchasing in excess of 1,000 pounds per week. Seafood specialty stores in the U.S. tend to buy up to 1,000 pounds weekly. Almost all supermarkets, restaurants and seafood specialty stores throughout the U.S. obtained live lobster from distributors, with an insignificant number purchasing directly from foreign processors. The greatest demand for live lobster is during special occasions, particularly July 4 weekend, Mother's Day, and the Labour Day weekend. With respect to value-added lobster products, developing a branded retail product in the United States is a very expensive proposition. Grocery shelf space for branded frozen lobster products requires listing and promotional fees to be paid to each chain that carries the products, absolutely consistent supply year round, and regular head office sales support. Limited retail opportunities may be available through strong distributors and brokers.

Because of the large demand for imported lobster products in the U.S., opportunities do exist for international suppliers. Following is a list of some specific lobster product forms for which niche opportunities exist in the U.S. market: live; vacuum-packed, canned frozen meat; cooked parts in-shell, fresh; stir fry packs; canned lobster meat; lobster paté; cooked whole in-shell, fresh; cooked parts, frozen; lobster salad; chowder packs; popsicle packs; and lobster sauces. United States fish and seafood distributors prefer {in order of importance} the following methods of learning about new international suppliers: personal contact initiated by the international supplying firm; brochures; recommendations from personal contacts; trade fairs; and articles or industry advertising. Most lobster buyers in the U.S. prefer to source from other U.S. companies, thus, international suppliers must have favourable price, quality, consistency of supply and accurate weights and measurements.

It is recommended producers sell through brokers to foodservice establishments in the United States. Brokers are already "in the door" at many of the foodservice distributors such as Hall Smith, SYSCO and Monarch. While an international lobster producer acting on his/her own behalf may be unable to gain a listing in the automated, computer-based buying system of the major foodservice companies, U.S. brokers often can. Foodservice brokers usually charge a commission of between 3-5 percent, however, on rare occasions these commissions can reach 10 percent, when the product is a new specialty product which is likely to be a slow mover, or loss leader.