

SEAFOOD MARKET IN BRIEF

The potential market for fish products is currently under-exploited by Canadian firms as Austria offers opportunities, even though it is a fairly small market of approximately 8 million people. Niche markets exist in Austria for specialty products and for the high-end restaurant/hotel sector, however strong competition from Scandinavian suppliers makes the market hard to penetrate initially. Canadian products attempting to enter the market must offer exceptional quality and be competitively priced. Seafood products with the best potential include frozen lobster (vac-pac and portion controlled), halibut, and high-end shellfish, including roe-on scallops.

It appears that there is little potential for smoked product entering the Austrian market based on a recent visit by Canadian exporters to the only Austrian smoker (OZEAN). The company plant buys salmon from Scotland and Norway, although the owner did express some interest in sourcing farmed Pacific salmon. The proprietor for the firm had previously sourced Canadian Atlantic salmon, but found that the inconsistent quality, colour and size made the product unattractive. Current Norwegian suppliers are very dependable and consistently supply top quality product.

Visits to the open air food market (NASCHMARKT) and a large supermarket (DONAUZENTRUM) by Canadian exporters, provided some key information concerning fisheries products available for sale in Austria. Canadian exporters found that prices were extremely high in the open market compared to Canadian standards, which indicates that Canadian fisheries products could be price competitive in the Austrian market. Of particular interest to exporters in the open market was smoked eel, smoked mackerel, and shellfish. The visit to the supermarket pointed out that as a general rule, Canadian seafood companies lag considerably behind their European competitors in terms of their packaging. The European retail packages are very eye catching, consumer friendly, and environmentally friendly. Therefore, Canadian exporters wishing to penetrate the retail sector must provide a competitively priced product with packaging appropriate for the Austrian market.

Although Austria is traditionally a "meat and potatoes" consuming country, there is limited potential for Canadian seafood products in niche markets. The market is very small however, so Canadian suppliers must be well focused and capable of supplying top quality products at competitive prices. Canadian seafood firms must be able to compete with product coming in from Eastern Europe, where the labour rates are comparatively low, in addition to competing with high-quality product currently imported into Austria from the Scandinavian countries. However, Vienna is a well-suited point of access for the Eastern European markets, and there is local expertise available to act as agents for small and medium-sized companies contemplating potential business activities in those areas.