

At the first Canadian lobster conference here in London last fall, Tim Lucas of Simsons Fisheries, noted that initially there was resistance from chefs to Canadian lobster. This was because it was something new and because they were cooked as if they were European lobsters. As the Canadian lobster has a thinner shell than its European cousin, overcooking causes the meat to toughen with a resulting loss in flavour. It was also said that the flavour of the Canadian lobster was inferior to the European lobster, but with revised cooking procedures the flavour differences are minimal.

Canada faces competition in the live trade from the United States which has become an important player in the past two years in Europe. The US lobster resource has also been growing and our American friends have made inroads in traditional Canadian markets such as France as well as developing newer markets including the UK, Spain and Italy. US sales have been particularly strong during the peak Christmas period. I might add that US supplies are commonly supplemented by those from Canada.

It is generally accepted among UK consumers that Canadian lobster is superior in meat texture and shell content to the American product. This is the result of a colder water environment and tighter controls over catches when lobster are moulting. Average sizes of American lobster also tend to be smaller than the Canadian lobster with the popular larger sizes being more expensive. Canada also sustains a larger and more conservatively managed biomass than the United States. This ensures greater stability of supply in the long term as well as the wide range of sizes necessary to meet the varied demands of export markets.

Canadian suppliers can guarantee supplies of live lobster in the UK virtually 365 days of the year. The wide range of sizes available mean that it is now possible to put lobster on the menu of major sporting and banqueting events in the UK. These events can cater for up to 10,000 portions of fresh cooked lobster, all of an identical size produced from live product.

In the longer term we would hope to see expansion of consumption beyond the traditional year end holiday season and more Canadian live lobster at retail level in the UK. This will require the expansion of holding tanks in supermarkets and specialized fish stores. Fish tanks are a growing phenomenon in North America a response both to increased consumer interest in fresh seafood and to greater year round availability of live shellfish, including lobster.

I would like to turn now to the UK market for frozen lobster in brine. This is the standard retail lobster pack which was designed essentially for the European market. Sales in the UK of