

LIVE LOBSTER

Live lobster accounts for about 50 of Canada's lobster production. Generally speaking the larger lobsters tend to be marketed live with an average weight of 1-1.5 pounds. There are no less than 11 grades ranging from less than one pound to 4 lbs and up. The product is destined largely for caterers. Federal fisheries regulations require that live lobster must be sold in "live" form. However, for shipping purposes a tolerance of 5% mortality is tolerated.

In each province of large number of buyers are shipping live lobsters directly into the market. Live lobsters are stored in floating wooden crates or wooden shore based tanks supplied with running sea water or in tidal pounds. Pound operators buy lobsters when they are abundant and hold them until seasonally reduced catches raise the selling price.

A major factor in the year round supply of live lobster has been the expansion of lobster pounds. Pounds vary from large cages to fenced off coves (open ocean systems) to sophisticated dryland enclosed filtration systems which one Canadian company has developed.

In the enclosed filtration system there is no limit to the length of time a lobster can be held in a state of reduced metabolism in which there is virtually no need for food. It is a condition similar to hibernation but without the associated shrinkage. Each lobster is held in a separate compartment to avoid cannibalism. The constant low temperature and limited energy loss means that the lobsters have harder shells are fuller and have firmer textured meat. Over a 10 month period weight loss does not exceed 5%.

Lobsters are often held for up to 10 months at the facility established by clearwater fine foods at Arichat, Nova Scotia. This facility offers state-of-art lobster holding technology and is equipped to hold 1.5 million pounds of lobster.

With respect to demand for live lobsters, it increases in the summer time in Atlantic Canada and New England with heavy tourism. However, as the supply of New England caught lobsters is greatest during the summer months, prices are generally lower during this period.