
GLOBAL MARKET OPPORTUNITIES REPORT: LOBSTER

INTRODUCTION

There are four species of lobster internationally harvested on a commercial basis: American lobster *{Homarus americanus}*; European lobster *{Homarus gammarus}*; spiny lobster *{Panulirus spp.}*; and the rock lobster *{Jasus spp.}*. These species are easily distinguished from each other, American/European lobsters have heavy front claws on the forward pair of thoracic appendages, which the spiny and rock lobsters lack. Spiny and rock lobsters have "horns" above the eyes which are not present in the American or European lobster. *Homarus spp.* lobsters have marketable meat in the claws, body, and tail; while for spiny and rock, only the tail is marketed. Another distinguishing feature of the spiny and rock lobsters is the presence of extra-long stiff antennae, often longer than its body, and more pronounced than American and European lobsters.

Based on Food and Agriculture Organization statistics, yearly world lobster landings increased steadily from 111,200 MT in 1982, to a high of 152,200 MT in 1988. Statistics for 1992 indicate that world lobster landing totalled 134,500 MT, a decrease of 8.9 percent from 1991. Broken down by species, the 1992 total landings were: spiny {66,200 MT}; American {65,900 MT}; rock {10.5 MT}; and, European {2,400 MT}. As of 1992, the leading countries in terms of landings were as follows: Canada {40,600 MT}; the United States {27,500 MT}; Cuba {9,300 MT}; Brazil {9,000 MT}; and, South Africa {3,100 MT}.

Vast amounts of live lobster are shipped worldwide via air freight. Lobster is also shipped cooked or frozen (as "popsicle" packs), or as cold-packed meat (in cans or plastic containers), and some is hermetically sealed and cooked in the can ("hot packed"). Lobster liver ("tomalley"), a greenish coloured paste, is sold as a spread, and red caviar from the females is also considered a delicacy in many markets. Once merely used as fertilizer, lobster has gained worldwide recognition as a seafood delicacy and has become well-known as a luxury food item.

LOBSTER PRODUCT FORMS

Live

Lobsters sold live are generally the larger specimens and tend to be marketed at an average weight of 1-1½ pounds. There are no less than eleven grades for live lobster ranging from 454g to more than 2270g, and the product is largely destined for restaurants and caterers. Products are packed in lined cardboard or styrofoam boxes with gel-packs as coolant.

Live lobsters have traditionally been stored in floating wooden crates, but technological advances have increased the use of shore based holding systems supplied with sea water running through advanced filtration systems. Lobster pound operators often buy lobsters when the catches are abundant, and hold them until seasonally reduced catches increase the selling price. The shore based holding systems drastically increase the amount of time live lobsters can be held because they are kept in a state of reduced metabolism. Each lobster is held in a separate compartment, and low temperatures give them a harder shell and dense textured meat.

Frozen Lobster

Frozen whole cooked lobster, frozen whole blanched lobster {vacuum packed}, and, frozen whole lobster blanched or cooked {vacuum skin packed} are various forms available as frozen products.

- {1} Frozen whole cooked lobster in brine is cooked, graded, packed in laminated pouches with brine, sealed and blast frozen with ten per case.
- {2} Frozen whole blanched lobster {vacuum packed} is lobster cooked for two minutes, frozen immediately, and cooking is completed by the end-user.
- {3} Frozen whole lobster, blanched or cooked {vacuum skin packed} uses specialized technology which extends shelf life to 24 months.
- {4} Frozen whole cooked lobsters are cooked and vacuum packed in light brine or wrapped in waxed paper.
- {5} Frozen whole cooked lobster {baby boil} is cooked, frozen, and glazed liner packed in 5kg cartons.