

SHARING TRADE SECRETS

Small New Brunswick Port Makes Big Waves in Trade with Cuba

What started out as a shrimp and lobster import operation from Cuba some 10 years ago has turned into an exclusive shipping of Canadian food exports to that island.

As the only Canadian port with cold storage facilities, Bayside Food Terminal, of Bayside, N.B. saw an opportunity to fill the Cuban ships on their return voyage home.

It was during his first trip to Cuba, in 1992, that Bayside President Peter Frye decided to convince the Cubans to expand their shipping business by carrying back Canadian goods instead of going back empty.

First Cuban ships

So convincing was his argument that the ships took on Canadian goods not only at his terminal but started loading at ports in Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia.

Frye didn't really mind. "At least they were being used for Canadian exports to Cuba," he says with a smile.

So the Cubans started picking

up frozen food and exports for the tourist population in Cuba.

With the expansion of its terminal facilities in 1990 — giving it a 3,000 tonne frozen, and 2,000 tonne chilled capacity — Bayside has now become a big league shipper to Cuba.

"We are now one of only two shippers of Canadian seed potatoes to Cuba," says Frye, "with annual shipments of 10,000 to 12,000 tonnes, a similar quantity being shipped by McCain."

In addition to seed potatoes — shipping concentrated during the months of October-November — Bayside now ships another 10,000 to 20,000 tonnes of frozen food (pork, chicken, beef, butter, pork lard, French fries) as well as powdered milk as cargo, to Cuba.

"This is no longer intended for mainly tourist consumption," says Frye, "but it is being bought

by the Cuban government for the local population."

Country of opportunity

According to Frye, this quantity could even double this year "as the economy of Cuba that has bottomed out a few years ago is now coming back."

Business with Cuba accounts for 30 per cent of the activity at Bayside which now sees the loading of one or two Cuban ships every month.

"Cuba is a fantastic country," says an enthusiastic Frye. "And it's the only spot in the world where Canadian companies have an advantage since U.S. firms are not allowed there," he adds.

But not for too long, he thinks.

Frye, who doesn't really consider himself a businessman, but rather a facilitator for deals between Canadians and Cubans, speaks highly of the Canadian Embassy in Havana.

"We have there a great team, very pro business for Canada," he comments, "and we should take advantage of that."

As the food trade keeps increasing, Frye is confident of even greater trade with Cuba. And with maritime shipping being the cheapest way to transport, he is probably right.

For more information on Bayside Food Terminal and bulk shipping to Cuba, contact Bayside President Peter Frye. Tel.: (506) 529-4923. Fax: (506) 529-4312.

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