

Fish consumption in Spain

In recent years, the fish consumption has increased significantly in Spain, in the period 1996-2002 the total fish consumption rose by 25%, fresh fish by 17%, frozen fish by 35%, canned fish by 33% and seafood, molluscs and crustaceans by 35%.

According to recent data, Spain has the largest annual per capita fish consumption in Europe after Portugal and is the third-largest world importer.

The positive trend in frozen fish consumption requires a special attention because of the phenomenon of the mad cow, the Spanish fleet has encountered many problems in maintaining its levels of catch, the European Community is questioning the reduction in the Community fleet and the setback in the catch and the Prestige oil spill has led to environmental concerns.

Demand for sea products by Spanish consumers is clearly higher than Spanish fish production and therefore imports are a basic need in this sector. More than 30% of the fish products consumed in Spain come from abroad.

Frozen fish products are marketed, on the Spanish market, through two channels: wholesalers and retailers.

The wholesale distribution: More than 60% of the fish and seafood consumed nationally is marketed through the MERCAS network.

The traditional fish stores: The traditional fish stores and supermarkets sell most frozen fish. Seafood, molluscs and crustaceans are mainly sold through traditional stores, with supermarkets and hypermarkets having smaller market shares.

In recent years, hotels and restaurants have contributed to the expansion and diversification of the market for the main companies that sell frozen fish in Spain for example 83,2% of all fish was eaten in the home and restaurants.

Frozen products, particularly frozen sea products have high growth potential on the Spanish market.

Hotels and restaurants make significant use of these products and have begun to demand items that are tailored exactly to their requirements.

Spain faces the problem of its dependency on foreign countries for these products and Spanish companies are addressing it with new investments to maintain their competitiveness and rescale their structures. Business movements in recent years indicate that this is an emerging market and that producers and distributors are taking positions to enable them to face the future.

The food market in Spain

Total spending on food in Spain in 2002 was, according to data of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 66,242 million euros. This data includes spending by households and restaurants and institutions.

The main thing to note with regard to the structure of spending on food in 2002 was the scant change compared to the previous year and even over the last five years.

The frozen products

Billings or business volume of the 2,000 largest companies on the Spanish market for perishable foodstuffs amountes to 39,667 million euro in 2001.

Frozen foods cover a very heterogeneous set of products, with very different characteristics and properties. Fish and seafood, both prepared and unprepared are the largest family in the category.

The global market from frozen products in Spain is the fifth largest in the European Union.

Frozen fish products

There has been a very significant increase in the use of fish in the diet of Spanish families.

The structure of consumption between 1996 and 2002 indicates that more fresh fish, frozen fish, canned fish and seafood, molluscs and crustaceans were consumed, respectively the increase has been 36%, 26%, 34% and 36% and the increase is truly significant.

The foreign trade

The demand for fish products by Spanish consumers outstrips Spanish fish production and imports are a basic need in the sector. More than 30% of the fish products consumed in Spain come from abroad, this situation has repercussions for the country'macroeconomic situation.

This situation on the Spanish market has been a spur for the internationalization of many of the main Spanish companies. There are Spanish companies in Ireland, Scotland, Argentina, Namibia, for example the main company in the sector PESCANOVA has 85 companies en Africa, Europe and South America.

The imports of fresh fish, frozen fish, crustaceans, molluscs are respectively 217,000, 348,000, 124,000 and 294,000 and are also important.

Imports rose significantly in 2001 and were the main motor for growth in the Spanish market and their average growth index during that year was 20.9% in volume and 22,9% in value.

However, Spain also sells fish products to third countries, its main exports are composed of 74,000 tonnes of fresh fish, frozen fish, molluscs, canned fish and crustaceans.

The final balance between exports and imports presents a large deficit of more than 1,300 million euro, placing exports in a very secondary position to imports, but which are seen as a very specific alternative for certain products where the market is mature and saturated.

The legislative environment

The sale of fish products is controlled in Spain by a series of regulations, both domestic and Community, designed to obtain proper market functioning and hence to improve relations among producers, distributors and consumers.

The regulations have been made as a result of the growing openness and globalization of markets, price stabilization and maintenance of market share. For proper operation of the market, it is necessary to regulate sales, preserve the quality of the product, promote transparency in trade and guarantee the quality of the product for the end consumer.

The Spanish government has approved Royal Decree 1380/2002 establishing the compulsory information to be included on the label of frozen and quick frozen fish, shellfish and aquaculture products. The new legislation came into force in January 2003 and the main rules governing the labelling of frozen and quick frozen fish products require the following information appear on the labels of products sold on the Spanish market: net weight, sales name, best before date, when the product is iced, name and address of the packer or manufacturer, catch area and ingredients.