



Ocean Master Foods International

Premium smoked products from sockeye and king

Ocean Master is specialized in the processing of high-value fish species: sockeye and king salmon, sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) and tuna. The company from Maple Ridge, which is quite close to Vancouver, mainly concentrates on smoked products that account for two thirds of the product range. There is demand for these carefully processed premium products in Europe, too. The export division of the business is going very well and is to be expanded further in the coming years.

Smoking is one of the traditional ways of processing salmon in North America. Whereas in Europe people tend to prefer cold smoked products, Canadians sooner chose hot smoked salmon products in the past. This preference is changing gradually and the share of cold smoked salmon products offered in Canadian shops is rising. Largely responsible for this development is the company Ocean Master that supplies both cold and hot smoked products to retailers and superior hotels and restaurants on the west coast of



Indian candy, strips of strongly smoked salmon coated with sugar, should appeal to European tastebuds, too.

General Manager Chris Mydske. Quality is very important when buying the raw materials. The company preferably chooses king salmon from trollers.

Canada. The company's delivery programme includes all the product forms that are to be had in this segment: steaks and fillets, smoked salmon sides (sliced or whole), gravlax, and salmon burgers, plus the traditional products 'jerky' and Indian candy: strongly spiced, hot smoked strips of salmon coated in a syrupy solution whose main ingredient is brown sugar. This is an absolute hit among the company's customers, for the contrast in flavour between the intensive smoke aroma and the slightly sweet coating is a very unusual taste experience.

Rigorous implementation of quality concept

General Manager Chris Mydske estimates that there could be three or four smokehouses in British Columbia of the size of Ocean Master. "Our competitive strategy is very simple: uncompromising quality." This concept is supported fully and without exception by the private company's shareholders who all come from the fish industry on the west coast. "For us, quality begins already with the catch. We prefer to buy our sockeye and king for the premium segment from trollers." The share of raw materials that is destined for the mass market comes from salmon farms that also produce Atlantic salmon on the Pacific coast. "Where wild salmon is concerned we buy only the top grades."

At the Maple Ridge company on Fraser River the salmon is first



thawed and carefully filleted and trimmed by hand. (In Canada it is compulsory for raw materials that are intended for cold smoking to be deep frozen for at least three weeks irrespective of whether the salmon comes from a farm or from fisheries.) After that, the sides are placed in a special spicy brine, called 'West Coast Brine', for three to six hours. This brine combines European taste with Canadian smoking traditions. "Of course, we also offer our European buyers dry salted products, too." The salmon then matures slowly to the popular smoked specialties in the big smokehouse that can take a good 1.5 tonnes. The standard product range comprises over 20 different products from salmon alone, plus some special products such as smoked sablefish sides or tuna (albacore) loins. "In volume terms, however, sockeye is clearly the decisive species, followed by king." A typical product is the pre-sliced side. The ready smoked sides are skinned before slicing and cooled to a temperature of about minus 6°C.



A lot of careful handwork goes into the products: from filleting and slicing to the positioning of the smoked salmon on trays.

Plans to increase export share

Ocean Master markets its products via an intermediate dealer in Vancouver. "Our own brands – Royal Pacific and Lox Royale – have a high reputation beyond the west coast, too. Part of production is also traded under private labels", says Chris Mydske. The company produces all the year round but, as in Europe, demand is particularly high in Canada at Easter and Christmas. In the export sector, business with Chi-

na has developed very strongly recently. Chinese customers mainly ask for fresh products in large quantities at as low a price as possible. "Of course we are happy to have these customers, too", Mydske assures us, "although the products we sell to them do not quite correspond to our image, for our strength is sooner in high-quality processing." For that reason, the company intends expanding its exports to Europe where demand has happily risen – despite a 28% duty that is payable on imports to the EU. The com-

paratively short shelf-life of cold smoked products, which is limited to 10 days due to stringent regulations in Canada, is not an obstacle: "Export Lox that we supply to Holland and Germany, for example, is transported frozen and not thawed until it has reached its destination." Ocean Master hopes to strengthen its position on the European Market in the coming years where it will mainly target high-end customers.

The realization of these ambitious goals has already begun. Just a short time ago, 100,000 dollars were invested in the modernization and extension of the Maple Ridge plant. A high-capacity blast freezer and a second slicing line were installed, the processing area and the frozen storage depot enlarged. "If necessary, we can increase our staff number from currently 13 in a very short time. Qualified auxiliary staff who work for us regularly in the peak season are always available."

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