Product and Market Development for Sea Cucumbers

Introduction

Development of underutilized species in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to increase in an effort to generate new revenues and provide additional employment in the harvesting and processing sectors. Wood-Pick Enterprises Ltd. has made significant progress in this area. Sea cucumber, a currently underutilized species, has evolved into one of the company’s ongoing product lines.

Newfoundland and Labrador sea cucumber are different from the species already available in the Asian market in that it has a thinner membrane wall, which makes it less suitable for the drying process. The new frozen vacuum-packed, Newfoundland and Labrador sea cucumbers are easy to prepare in that they do not require re-hydration. In response to a requirement to promote this new innovative product, Wood-Pick Enterprises, with support from the Fisheries Diversification Program, began a comprehensive marketing campaign dedicated to increasing product awareness and sales of sea cucumbers. Product development and packaging design was conducted simultaneously.

Background

Wood-Pick Enterprises located in Wareham, Newfoundland was established in 1989. Since that time, the company has developed a wide variety of products including sea urchin roe and smoked salmon. Recently, the company completed extensive research and development in sea cucumber production. Sea cucumbers are considered nutritious, and a medicinal delicacy in Asian markets where benefits are believed to include blood purification, kidney enhancement and blood pressure reduction. The objective of this project was to produce fresh-frozen, vacuum-packed sea cucumbers and develop marketing strategies dedicated to increasing product sales.

Methodology

The marketing project was directed towards creating consumer awareness and demand for frozen, vacuum-packed Newfoundland and Labrador sea cucumber. It involved an advertising campaign using radio, television, newspapers, as well as sponsorships, all aimed at the traditional dried cucumber markets. A seafood marketing company was retained to assist in product development and market analysis in Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary, Montreal, New York, Los Angeles,
San Francisco, Taipei, Hong Kong, Singapore and Beijing. New packaging material and promotional materials were developed.

Illustration 1-2  Sea Cucumber Processing Line

Results

The product was successfully distributed to selected destinations throughout North America and Asia. Increases in consumer acceptance and sales were realized as a result of marketing initiatives. In-store product demos, media and newspaper promotions led to increased sales. In excess of 17 supermarkets were supplied in Canada alone, with the Vancouver market being particularly strong and producing repeat orders. The mainland China market was small; however, sales are ongoing.

It was concluded that the United States market did not offer significant potential, nor did Hong Kong, given their preference for other traditional sea cucumber species. Overall sales increased, and as a result, Wood-Pick Enterprises was able to maintain 15 jobs due to the company’s ability to increase market share for frozen, vacuum-packed sea cucumber.

Conclusion

The marketing initiatives of this project included new packaging design, product promotions and market development for Newfoundland and Labrador, frozen vacuum-packed sea cucumber. All these elements showed positive results for the proponent. Newfoundland and Labrador frozen, vacuum-packed sea cucumbers are a different species than products currently consumed in Asian markets; however, attributes such as exceptional quality and reduced preparation times were effectively communicated to customers. The efforts of Wood-Pick Enterprises have led to increased sales of this underutilized species, and as a direct result, its workforce has been maintained in preparation for future growth in the newly developed Newfoundland sea cucumber industry.