

Croatia Angling for More Seafood

By Andreja Misir

When tourists visit Croatia with its 5,835 kilometers of gorgeous Adriatic coastline, they might reasonably expect a delicious seafood dinner caught fresh from the sea.

Unfortunately, overfishing in the Adriatic, an inadequate fishing fleet and a lack of infrastructure to transport and process seafood have left Croatia unable to meet the demand that a burgeoning tourist industry has placed on a dwindling supply.

U.S. suppliers have begun stepping into the breach and upped their sales of fish and seafood to Croatia from \$85,000 in 2000 to \$588,000 in 2001. This amount may seem a drop in the bucket when compared to the \$3 billion worth of fish and seafood exported by the United States in 2001, but it is almost 11 percent of the total \$5.4 million worth of U.S. agricultural exports to Croatia that year.

Future Catch Limited

While Croatia is still a net exporter of seafood, exports have been declining yearly. A reduced catch by the country's fleet has prompted the Croatian government to take steps to remedy the seafood shortfall and lack of infrastructure in its seafood industry.

Stricter oversight and enforcement of smaller annual quotas for fishermen are expected. Catches for some species and in some areas will be banned altogether.

In contrast to shortages from the sea, past efforts to develop a Croatian fish farm-



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ing industry led to overproduction of a few species—such as sea bass and sea bream—and sinking prices. The Croatian aquaculture industry wants to introduce new fish and shellfish species that will appeal to consumers and modernize existing facilities that specialize in breeding blue fin tuna, sea bass and sea bream.

Infrastructure Outdated, Underutilized

Seafood collection points for processing and refrigerated transportation are widely dispersed. There are no private warehouses or shipping centers. Also, private companies, though numerous, are not investing in the sector, and the six main seafood processing facilities are working at only 35 percent of capacity.

Investment in Croatia's cold chain and processing infrastructure could enhance future sales.

Prospects for U.S. Exporters

As Croatia's tourism industry grows, its 7-kilogram-per-capita consumption of seafood is expected to increase dramatically

and imports will be needed to meet increased demand. Currently, there is a demand for hake, squid (Patagonia and California), grouper, salmon, shark fillets and swordfish fillets. Demand is also developing for convenience and processed fish products for use in both the hotel, restaurant and institutional sector and the retail sector. U.S. seafood suppliers looking for opportunities in Eastern Europe should research this growing market to take advantage of new export opportunities. ■

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