

Fall 2010

Specialty Foods Magazine

The official publication of the Small
Scale Food Processor Association



SSFPA Members Grow, Produce and Package

Products That Are In-Demand!

Canada Post Publications Agreement Number: 40609661

The European Union – Obvious Opportunities

By Pernille Fischer Boulter, President & CEO of Kisserup International Trade Roots

Imagine if each one of the fifty U.S. states spoke a different language. Imagine if the cultural differences between each of the states was more distinctive than, say, New Orleans and Alaska. Outrageous inter-state transportation costs, no existing Free-Trade agreement with Canada and an incredibly successful domestic manufacturing base.

Well, that pretty much sums up the European Union (EU). Discouraged yet?

This is pretty much the end of the bad news. The EU consists of 495 million consumers living in 27 countries! The collective buying power of the various member countries is larger than the U.S. One just has to understand the EU in order to begin to exploit it. Today, there is one common currency (in most EU countries). And likely in the near future, there will be a Canada European Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

One of the challenges in understanding the EU is that you are not “just” selling to the EU, you are often selling to one, several or all of

their member states. For example, lobsters exported to the Netherlands will usually be re-exported to five other EU countries.

When we talk about food within the EU, where English is usually not the first language, let us first define the two most popular food terms:

- **Food security:** Food security is defined by the World Health Organization as access to sufficient

cient, safe and nutritious food.

- **Food safety:** Food safety focuses on setting standards regarding the safety of food, good manufacturing practices and quality control of agricultural products at all steps of the processing chain.

Food safety, for many Europeans, is closely tied to green food, organic food and environmental impacts. This leads to another new term: green procurement. A trend in the EU, green procurement impacts decision makers in many ways:

- The fertility and biological activity of the soil is maintained or increased by the use of pesticides and fertilizers, resulting in water and soil contamination (eutrophication, acidification and ecotoxicity). Organic agriculture has less negative impact.
- Soil erosion.
- Loss of biodiversity.
- There is uncertainty about the use of genetically modified organisms (GMO) and their impact on the environment and human health.
- Use of energy for processing food and transportation.
- Use of resources for packaging.

It is also very common to see specialty food products sold in EU states containing 10 or more languages on the primary packaging.

The new EU Organic Logo

The EU organic farming logo offers consumers’ confidence about the origins and qualities of their food and drink and its presence on any product ensures compliance with the EU organic farming regulation.

As of July 2010, the EU organic logo is obligatory for all organic pre-packaged food products within the EU (see it at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/eu-policy/logo_en).

It is also possible to use the logo on a voluntary basis for non pre-packaged organic goods produced within the EU or any organic products imported from third countries.

Do your research and understand both the overall EU requirements and the regional differences. Dag Falck of SSFPA is among those who have been and continue to provide very valuable insight for food processors. A recent look at www.ota.com will provide further understanding and support, and Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada (www.agr.gc.ca) provides information on international market supports and programs.

So go ahead—there are obvious opportunities in the EU—supported by Canada! ■

Pernille Fischer has worked in over 50 countries worldwide, she speaks six languages and she is on PROFIT’s Magazine’s panel of Export Experts. Kisserup has offices in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Copenhagen, Denmark.



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