

Marketing

SURVEY ON TURBOT MARKETING EXAMINES AQUACULTURE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Segmentation, Industry Sector Affect Opinions in Spain, Netherlands

Summary

Fish farmers often have limited information about the issues their customers find important. In turn, those customers may have few facts regarding the interests of their customers, consumers. As reflected in the results of a survey of turbot farmers and their customers located primarily in Spain and the Netherlands, feedback on customer priorities can yield opportunities for targeted product development in aquaculture.

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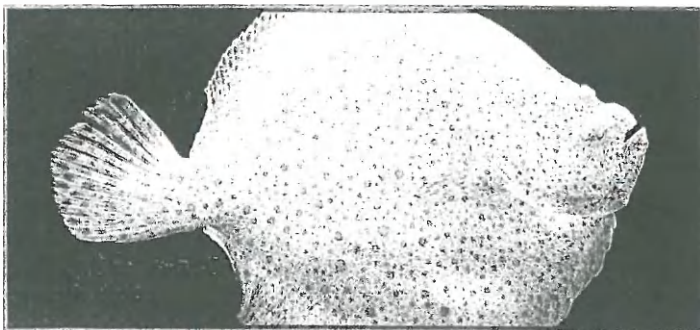
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In a market-driven environment, different groups or market segments have varying needs and desires. Classic segmentation variables like age, education, and income are mostly descriptive and do not really explain the particular desires and barriers consumers experience with respect to products like food.

More modern techniques use psychographic variables to discern different consumer groups, where con-



While turbot producers and their customers had different priorities regarding the fish, they all agreed on the importance of freshness and shelf life. Photo courtesy of AquaTT UETP Ltd. Ireland



Aquaculture producers and their immediate customers can both improve sales by tailoring their products to the marketing priorities of consumers.

sumer motivations and barriers are used to explain the functional properties they expect and desire from their foods. These variables point more directly toward the characteristics and properties new or improved food products should contain.

For example, it has been suggested that Northern European consumers attach more importance to safety and control of their fish and meat, whereas Southern European consumers attach more value to how natural and fresh the products are. Such knowledge directs different products to be developed for each group.

Consumers obviously are not the only stakeholders interested in aquaculture product development. Fish farmers often have little information about the issues their customers find important. The same situation holds for their customers who sell to consumers – the customers often have little factual evidence about the interests of consumers.

European Study

In research funded by the European Union within a cooperative research action for technology project, the authors recently conducted a study to determine what European consumers considered important issues regarding farmed fish.

In late 2005 and early 2006, researchers collected responses from 358 consumers from Spain and 344 consumers from the Netherlands. Concurrently, five turbot farmers and 11 of their customers in Iceland, Netherlands, Britain, Germany, and Portugal were asked what they considered important aquaculture issues. The farmers also indicated what they expected their customers to find important.

The consumers were administered an additional questionnaire on their food-related lifestyles in order to better explain differences in importance ratings for different consumer groups. The issues related to sensory and intrinsic qualities, production, convenience, and other extrinsic aspects.

Consumer Feedback

From former research, the authors knew that many consumers generally lack confidence with respect to fish

Farmers risk focusing too much on the wrong intrinsic details of their fish. Taste and texture are straightforward aspects that could be improved following some market research. Aquaculture producers are in a position to make freshness a unique selling point to their customers. Different methods of stunning and slaughter affect texture and shelf life dramatically. Specialized industrial and/or consumer packaging could also be part of such a strategy.

Extrinsic aspects such as sustainable production and welfare issues can create added value in the market. Investments in these aspects can lead to higher costs, although not necessarily. Financial revenue could be obtained by applying the right marketing strategies.

Different target groups direct toward different products. Where consumers from different countries express different general interests, product development could be even more targeted. Among the Spanish consumers, the authors were able to identify a high-quality group with special interest in fish from sustainable and natural sources, certified by quality and brand labeling.

One Dutch group seemed particularly concerned with responsible production methods and less with price. Another Dutch consumer group was less quality-oriented but had interest in convenience and was price-sensitive. "Not-too-fancy" products in a ready-to-eat form might fit their expectations.

Seizing Marketing Opportunities

Aquaculture can offer many unique marketing points that are often neglected. Studies like the ones described offer general direction on where to go with specific product development. In order to be successful, however, more efforts are needed. To progress toward concrete products or services for appropriate target groups, deeper insights into target groups and their expectations are required. Moreover, any product or service development requires a plan on how to bring the new product to the attention of the target customers.

On the other hand, specific product development can save a company from having to compete just on price, offering the same products as its competitors. Specifically aimed development of a product can save resources and efforts wasted by going in the wrong direction.



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