



## ■ What's driving seafood innovation in France?



By *Lindsey Partos*, *SeafoodSource* contributing editor, reporting from Paris

13 December, 2010 – Paris-based market research firm XTC Innovation uses a five-pronged approach to explaining the varying influences of innovation. The five axes of innovation are: health, physical, pleasure, convenience and ethics. The firm's findings suggest that health and wellness offer opportunities yet to be fully embraced by the country's seafood industry, while the pleasure principle is currently driving innovation in the French market.

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Olivier Hausheer, managing director at XTC Innovation, talks to SeafoodSource about the landscape for seafood innovation in France.

### Partos: How would you define innovation?

**Hausheer:** Innovation must bring a new benefit to the consumer, for example a new recipe, a new function or a new design.

### What's driving seafood innovation in France?

As a nation, the French are very sensitive to pleasure, therefore many seafood products launched onto the market reflect this pleasure principle. Our data from 2008–09 shows the weight of seafood innovation for the pleasure axis at 57.1 percent. This is higher than pleasure-focused innovation for the food industry as a whole [at] 52.7 percent.

At 18.5 percent, the convenience axis revealed the second-largest weighting in seafood innovation. Convenience and practicality seem to play a considerable role. Many seafood products are frozen, and these often slot into the convenience and pleasure profiles.

Twenty years ago, frozen seafood products were basic in France. Today the landscape is different,

and there is a sophisticated range. In France we have Picard, for example, which is an innovative frozen food firm.

### Is sustainability a growing concern among French seafood consumers?

Our data shows that ethical concerns are picking up in the seafood arena, with the "ethics" axis representing 12.5 percent of the weight of axes of innovation in 2008–09, compared to just 4.3 percent for the food industry as a whole.

### Where are the opportunities in new-product development for seafood?

Health appears to be a distinct area of opportunity for the seafood sector. While there is strident innovation in this area from the rest of the food industry, our data suggests the health and wellness trend is not yet really reflected in seafood innovation. The weight of innovation in health for seafood (both chilled and frozen) products came in at 10.9 percent in 2008–09, compared to 19.5 percent for the total food industry.

### What challenges does the French seafood industry face?

In terms of challenges, retaining market share of the protein sector is essential for the seafood sector. From a wider perspective, the challenge of the food industry is to give the key to the consumer; in the way they make their choice. Firms deliver the message and the information, but they do not tell the consumer how they should use it. Education will play a powerful role, and in particular dosages and measures. For example we see the 100-calorie Coca Cola, and 100-calorie chocolate or Danone's Actimel. This intimates the notion of "health capital," with the consumer managing his or her own capital through measures and dosages.

## **What are the drivers in packaging-led sustainability?**

Reducing the weight in packaging seems to be a driver. Seafood firms appear to be making the effort to manufacturer lighter packages that reduce the carbon footprint and cut transport costs, for example Kritsen's Organic Smoked Salmon range. However, overall we feel there is a lack of effort in innovation and visibility to the consumer.

We've seen companies making the effort in packaging but not communicating this to the consumer. It's difficult for consumers to make a choice based on sustainability criteria. But the industry really should tap into the sense of good that the consumer has when he or she sees a full recycling bin.

It is essential that seafood firms adapt their products to eating trends in the market, for example the microwave, the toaster, the freezer, the hob (stove), the barbecue, the steamer and the wok.

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