

Frozen Foods

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TRENDS OF FROZEN FOODS (PART 1)

"In Japan, there is still an image of frozen foods being cheap. But in reality, freezing technology has been vastly developed, and the situation is beginning to change. We hope to find nice partner with an appealing brand of frozen foods." This is what a chief buyer of a major Japanese department store stresses. In Japan, imported frozen foods are used as ingredients or raw materials for most cases. For example, there are cases where fine quality chicken is being used as a raw material. It is often pointed out that these high quality frozen foods could be sold as an individual brand. There are greater needs for buyers looking for new kinds of frozen products.

According to Japan Frozen Food Association, the domestic production volume of frozen foods in 2013 (January to December) rose 5.0% year-on-year, breaking the record high of 2006 and exceeding the figure of the previous year in 4 consecutive years. The production value grew 5.3%, exceeding the figure of the previous year in 3 consecutive years. Of this, household use increased significantly for 8.4% in volume, while business use was up 2.8%.

There are many voices regarding "reinforcement of dining products" from retailers and each manufacturer is strengthening their dining products through frozen dinner meals. Since more consumers prefer easily prepared meals, the frozen food category is gathering attention. In the business use market, the food-service industry is recovering, so ready-made meals or CVS categories are brisk. In addition, nursing care or home delivery categories are also growing, and each manufacturer is developing products for each of these categories. From these trends, needs for frozen food products are growing more than ever.

Japan's Frozen Food Products

Frozen food products were developed in order to preserve the flavor, texture, color, nutrition, and hygiene of fresh foods over a long period of time. Japanese frozen food products are made to meet the following standards:

(1) Pre-processing

Choose fresh ingredients and wash them thoroughly. In case of fish, exclude head, guts, bones, and fins that could not be eaten. Also, cut the fish in smaller pieces or batter it so that it is ready to fry. Do the pre-process step for the consumers.

(2) Quick-freezing

Quick-freeze at a very low temperature to prevent the quality from changing when the tissue breaks.

(3) Appropriate packaging

Frozen food products are packaged in a way that avoids the product from becoming damaged while it is delivered to the hands of the customers. The package must include specific information for the customers that are decided by law such as instructions on handling or cooking.

(4) Preserving the products under -18C

Product temperature must be kept under -18C during each step of production, storage, export, delivery, and sales.



Frozen non-fried products at supermarket



Frozen fried products

Production and Import Trends of Frozen Food Products

According to the Japan Frozen Food Association, the domestic production volume of frozen food products in 2013 was 1,550,085 tons (105.0% year-on-year) and production value (factory shipment value) was 677.4 billion yen (105.3% year-on-year).

	2012	2013	Year-on-Year
Factories	523	513	98.1%
Volume (tons)	1,476,368	1,550,085	105.0%
Value (1 mil. yen)	643,293	677,373	105.3%

Japan Frozen Food Association conducted a survey to 31 of their corporate members (regular member: 103, associate member: 420) that were thought to handle imported frozen foods. Imports of prepared frozen foods are done by many trading companies and volume sellers other than the members of the association. Therefore, the results of this survey does not necessary reveal the overall situation of Japan's prepared frozen food imports, but it is valid information to get an overview and understand the fluctuations.

The import volume and value of 2012 and 2013 (surveyed 31 companies of the Association) increased from the previous year. The item categories were largely divided into "fried products" (livestock, sea food, others) and "non-fried products." More than 80%

of the frozen food products are consumed for business-use. As a wider range of "branded" frozen food products are introduced to the Japanese market in the future, much more frozen food products for home use are expected to increase as well.

Import Volume and Value of Frozen Foods*

*Surveyed 31 companies of Japan Frozen Food Association

Year	Volume		Value	
	Tons	Year-on-Year	1 Million Yen	Year-on-Year
2011	246,330	108.2%	109,048	117.6%
2012	273,635	111.1%	122,799	112.6%
2013	282,651	108.2%	142,542	116.1%

The main imported items in the "fried products" category are fried white fish, fried flavored chicken, fried horse mackerel, fried shrimp, fried mixed vegetables and meat, fried pork, fried meat, fried squid, loin cutlet, fried chicken, fried potatoes, onion rings etc.

In the "non-fried products" categories, there are takoyaki (octopus balls), spring roll, dumplings, cooked or grilled fish, cabbage role, bread, dim sum, sauce, cake, tart, hamburger steak, waffle, chocolate brownie, sweet potato, French toast, donuts, mangos etc. The number of items is increasing.

The next issue will deal with popular imported frozen food products at stores with description of consumption trends.