

Value-added catfish

QVD FOOD Co – a substantial exporter of frozen shatter-packed, interleaved or IQF boneless and skinless pangasius fillets to the USA, Europe, Australia and other markets – is already planning to further expand its production capacity and to offer more value-added lines from this increasingly popular farm-reared river catfish.

'We have space on our land where we plan to build another factory for value added products,' reveals Jean-Charles Diener, QVD Food's sales manager.

'We have such big demand for fillets that we don't have enough raw material to supply such a plant at present, so we'll see about it next year.

'We are advancing step-by-step and believe that Europe, in particular – including the new members of the EU – has huge potential as a market for pangasius.

'The USA is still our biggest market, despite the fact that the Catfish Farmers of America – whose members grow an entirely different species to us – have tried to block our catfish in many ways.

'Its action has created excellent publicity for our pangasius in the USA, and we have increased our sales there as a result. Our pangasius is cheaper and of better quality than the US catfish.'

QVD Food – a young company that has grown to become one of Vietnam's four biggest exporters of pangasius with an export turnover in 2005 of \$50 million – says that the odour and the flavour of fillets from pangasius are very mild and the texture is similar to sole.

Europe has overtaken Asia as QVD Food's second biggest market for pangasius, says Jean-Charles Diener. The company is already exporting this fish to many European countries including Italy, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Greece and Poland. He says that there was huge interest in the company's products at May's European Seafood Exhibition in Brussels.

'We made very good contacts in Brussels, which was a fantastic show for us,' he tells *Seafood International*.

'I had three big customers waiting for me all the time. It was crazy! Even at Vietfish 2004, which was smaller and quieter than the Brussels show, people from Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, the UK, the USA and Asia visited our stand.

QVD Food sells about 3200-3600 tonnes of pangasius a month, about 95% of which is *Pangasius hypophthalmus*, known locally as tra. Output of *Pangasius bocourti*, known locally as basa, used to account for about 50% of the production, but has been overtaken by tra, which has proved to be a superior species for farming.

There are four main colour grades for pangasius fillets: white, light pink, dark pink and yellow, all of which have specific markets, says Jean-Charles Diener, who specialises in the European market.

QVD's main markets for white pangasius fillets in Europe are Italy and Spain. 'I sell virtually all white fillets –



Jean-Charles Diener, QVD Food's sales manager, with a harvest size Pangasius.

the most expensive – to these markets.

'Customers in northern European countries, such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands, buy more of the light pink fillets. I don't usually sell grade three and four fillets in Europe.

'We try to manage our farming to produce white fillets only. Most of the fish grown in floating cages in the river have white or light pink flesh.'

QVD Food, which is headquartered in Ho Chi Minh City and has its main processing plant in the Sa Dec industrial zone in the southern province of Dong Thap, has its own fish farms. These are being increased in output to supply 60% of the company's raw material.

The company's new farm in Sa Dec produces about 1000 tonnes of fish a month.

'Our own production, plus our strong association with a few big farmers, guarantees us a stable raw material supply and better control of fish quality during farming,' says Bui Van Dung, who founded QVD Food with his son Bui Duc Quy, in 1999.

'We control our customers' products from the fish in the farm, to the final product inside the container before shipment,' he adds.

The fish are reared in floating net cages in Vietnam's Mekong delta. The branches of the Mekong River – with their strong flow and high temperature year round – have enabled Vietnam to become the world's top producer of fast-growing pangasius.

Special well boats carry the harvested fish alive from the cages to QVD's factory, where they are immediately bled, filleted, skinned, trimmed and sized before being frozen at -35 to -40 deg C and kept in a cold storage at -18 to -20 deg C. The entire process takes between two and three hours.

'With our production volume of 10,000 tonnes of final product a year, and with a year-round harvesting

season, we can supply our customers at any time,' according to Bui Van Dung.

Boneless and skinless pangasius fillets are available in sizes 60/120, 120/170, 170/230 and 230g and up. Products can be packed under the QVD brand or customers' own private labels IQF, IWP, interleaved or shatter-packed. Other pangasius products offered by QVD include H&G fish, nuggets, steak and strips.

QVD's recently commissioned processing plant in Sa Dec is situated on a 27,000 square metre site and can produce up to 120 tonnes of pangasius fillets a day.

The factory, which has 1200 workers, has implemented a HACCP plan drafted according to importers' requirements regarding personal hygiene of workers, workplace and products, as well as processing and storage temperatures. It has a cold storage capacity of 1000 tonnes and also has its own analytical laboratory.

QVD's association with other companies in central Vietnam involved in the processing and trading of seafood permits the company to deliver other products such as mahi mahi and red snapper fillets, as well as cephalopods including octopus, squid and cuttlefish.

Exports 7000 tonnes a year

BASEAFOOD, the trading name of Baria-Vungtau Seafood Processing and Import Joint Stock Company, exports around 7000 tonnes of finfish, cephalopods, crab, shrimp, surimi and dried fish a year.

Established in 1992 in the southern Vietnamese port of Vung Tau, Baseafood made the switch from a wholly state-owned company to a joint-stock enterprise in June this year.

It is a large scale business owning four seafood processing factories with more than 1500 employees. Three of

the plants process frozen products the other produces a diverse range of dried items.

Baseafood's export turnover is \$12-15 million a year, and it exports products to Asia – mainly China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Korea – the EU – Italy, Germany, France and the UK – North America, Russia and Lithuania. The company processes HACCP and Halal standards and its EU code is DL 34.

Its main markets are Japan (about 45% of turnover), Korea (30%), Europe (15%), Tran Xuan Tam, the company's import-export & trade department, tells *Seafood International*. Main species export Europe include cuttlefish, squid, octopus and skipjack tuna.

Baseafood produces around 300 tonnes of frozen surimi from local caught lizard fish (eso) and threac bream (ityoyri) each year. These products are exported mainly to Korea, Russia and Japan.

The company is also a significant supplier of cephalopods. Around 1000 tonnes of frozen cuttlefish, squid and octopus products are produced each year. Products include frozen seafin mix, squid and cuttlefish skewers, whole cuttlefish and squid, whole cleaned skinless cuttlefish, cuttlefish tentacles on bamboo stick, cuttlefish fillets, boiled octopus (flower style), boiled cut octopus, skinless headless squid fillets and squid tube fillets (IQF), boiled squid rings.

Baseafood also exports about 1100 tonnes a year of frozen black tiger shrimp. Product forms include HC, HLSO, PD, PUD, PTO and Noba-stretched PDTO.

In addition, the company produces and exports a great variety of other items. They include frozen big eye fillets; yellow strip trevally fillets; sardine fillets; blue swimming cra