

It's High Season for Ice Cream in Brazil

Contributed by Alexandre Rocha
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Sector foreign trade is still small, but the Brazilian Ice Cream Industry Association (Abis) bets on tropical fruit flavours to increase shipping and end the product's seasonal aspect, with large sales in warm weather and small sales in winter. On the domestic market, today is the National Ice Cream Day, and producers are expecting a warm season.

By Alexandre Rocha

Spring started in Brazil yesterday, and today is the National Ice Cream Day, a commemorative date established in 2002 by the Brazilian Ice Cream Industry Association (Abis) so as to mark the start of the high season of product sales.

Around 70% of Brazilian production is consumed between the warm days at the end of September and the beginning of March. So as to end the seasonal aspect and produce at full throttle, the sector wants to export so as to supply the Northern summer, while it is winter in Brazil.

The idea is to bet on the country image and on exclusively Brazilian flavours, including tropical fruit like cupuaçu, acerola, pitanga, graviola and açaí, all typically Brazilian.

"We currently export, but we are working in this direction, turned mainly to tropical fruit, as flavours like chocolate, cream, and chocolate chip exist in all countries," stated Abis president Eduardo Weisberg.

In reality, the country sells little on the foreign market. Last year, export totalled US\$ 908,000, but that is a small volume when compared to sector revenues, which totalled US\$ 778 million (preliminary figures).

According to Weisberg, this value only refers to a "product exchange," probably between multinational companies operating in the area.

The organization work initially consists in convincing companies of the advantages of exports and providing incentives for quality certification.

In this sense, over 200 companies in the sector, according to Weisberg, are already participating in program "Safe Food," sponsored by organizations like the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae), the National Service of Industrial Education (Senai) and the National Health Surveillance Agency (Anvisa).

"We are preparing the companies, and when planning to export, quality is essential," he said.

Apart from that, the organization is bringing together some examples of companies, that are ready for international sales, and is going to send a project for a commercial program to the Brazilian Export Promotion Agency (Apex).

If everything runs as planned, the proposal should be presented at the beginning of next year. The Apex has recently released a program of the kind turned to producers of equipment and material for the ice cream industry, and it is targeting Dubai as one of its potential markets.

According to Weisberg, the sector should initially concentrate on markets like the United States, Europe, and Asia, especially Japan and China. But the idea is, in future, to expand to other destinations, including the Middle East.

"If we really want to export, it must be to the whole world," he said, adding that the association's strategy forecasts,

among other actions, participation in international fairs.

Hot Summer

But the sector also has its eye on the domestic market, and finishing with the seasonal aspect of sales is one of the objectives in this area. The idea is to change the Brazilian perception that ice cream and ice lollies are only products for consumption on hot days, and think of them as nutritious food products.

In this sense, the producers have already had a victory, the inclusion of ice-lollies in the meals supplied at schools in the city of São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil, in the southeast of the country.

The city hall decided to include distribution of the product every fortnight. "The idea is to promote this cultural change in children, resulting in good results in the middle and long term," stated Weisberg.

But while the change does not come, the sector hopes for hot days. Weisberg hopes that the climate and the economy in the country contribute to a "marvellous summer." In the last season, according to him, sales were not so good as these aspects did not collaborate.

Profile

Last year, Brazil produced 533 million litres of ice cream (preliminary figures), little over the 2002 figure, 527 million litres.

To have an idea, according to figures for the year of 2001, supplied by the Abis, the United States, the largest world producer, manufactured 61.3 billion litres.

Brazil was in 12th position in the rank of largest producers, losing to colder countries, among them Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, and Finland.

The sector, according to Weisberg, includes 10,000 companies concentrated mainly in the South and Southeast of the country, and generates around 40,000 direct and indirect jobs (between 15,000 and 18,000 direct).

Of these companies, according to the Abis president, between 200 and 300 are medium and large, the remaining being micro and small.

"Small and medium companies are growing, showing that they also have quality, but the sector is still dominated by large companies," he finished off.

Among the large companies are multinationals like Nestlé and Kibon, belonging to the Unilever group.

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