

Fish and chip sales take a battering

Over the past few years, fish and chip shops have been doing a roaring trade especially in the North. The typical shop is family run, has low overheads, and the owners have a pride in supplying traditional food to local people. Many of them look at their costs, add on a profit margin and hope that sales will be high enough to give them a reasonable income. Prices range from as low as £1.60 to £2.80, but there are significant regional variations and local prices are influenced by the number of direct competitors. Sales are sensitive to price changes, but the suppliers think that the quality of the product is most important. Reputation is everything in maintaining sales in an increasingly competitive market.

The short-term problems that have hit the suppliers are a rise in fish prices reflecting the growing scarcity of high-quality white fish and the weather conditions that have increased potato prices. A spokesman for the Fish Fryers Association was recently reported as saying:

Things are getting so bad that some of our members are barely covering their wages and the cost of materials. Normally, businesses would react to this by raising prices. Our members are reluctant to do this because of the economic circumstances of their

customers. Price rises and cutting the size of portions will not make us better off. The take-away food business is easy to start and is getting more diverse all the time. Our members are trying to increase the range of food served and must have an eye on long-term business rather than short-run difficulties.

Trends and fashions in food consumption may be starting to affect the most loyal of fish and chip consumers. The demand for low fat foods is increasing and survey data show that, as they get better off, consumers are widening the range of take-away food they eat. Even in the world of fish and chips the market is changing. Although there are a huge number of shops, a growing proportion are franchise outlets of large businesses, such as Harry Ramsden's. This business grew rapidly from a single shop near Leeds to a multinational operation in only a few years. All in all, the traditional chippy may be a disappearing feature of urban life. Will only grandparents remember fish and chips with salt, vinegar and bits wrapped in newspaper? Is the future trend towards up-market fish restaurants serving fish in sauces rather than batter and chips that are low fat and from organically grown potatoes?



Harry Ramsden's in Bournemouth. Harry Ramsden's has broken the world record on four occasions for selling the most portions of fish and chips in a day. The current record being 12,105 in Melbourne.

Source: Harry Ramsden's.