

MARKETING

A promotional campaign for green pepper

BY ANDERS MATSSON

How a market development exercise carried out in Sweden helped launch green pepper on a large scale in that market.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO OUR company carried out a promotional campaign for green pepper in the Swedish market that has helped expand sales there considerably. From an import volume of approximately three tons in 1970, green pepper imports into Sweden reached a peak in 1976 of almost 100 tons. Much of this growth can be attributed to active promotion in the market. The market development campaign we carried out, which was a typical promotional exercise for this type of product, can serve as an example for product development and promotion of spices.

Untapped potential

Green pepper was not introduced into Sweden until 1961. It was first imported by a famous restaurant in Stockholm, which used the pepper for some of its special dishes. Demand for green pepper spread primarily to other luxury restaurants during the next several years, which used it mainly for one dish: green pepper steak. As consumption in the catering sector increased, demand was created to a small extent for green pepper in consumer packs.

Anders Mattsson is vice president of Norofalka AB, a large spices processor, packer and distributor in Sweden. This article was originally a paper that he presented to the recent International Symposium on the Export Development of Spices in London, which was organized by ITC and the Export Market Development Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

But overall demand for the spice grew slowly during the 1960s. By 1970, imports of green pepper into Sweden totalled only about three tons.

In 1972 my company, which is a major spice packer, processor and distributor in Sweden, decided that sufficient potential demand existed for green pepper to justify a large-scale marketing campaign. We had begun importing it in 1971. That year we purchased just a few hundred kilos. Only a few restaurants were using green pepper to any great extent then. Most consumers were not familiar with it. The potential market was therefore large, particularly because green pepper is required in larger amounts than black or white pepper for the same applications—about ten to twenty times as much.

A new pack

In 1972 when we began discussing the possibility of marketing green pepper we were all convinced that a better pack was essential. The first step in the market development exercise was therefore to adopt a new one. The tin that had been used in the past, which ranged from 25 gr to 2,000 gr drained weight, had the advantage of giving a long shelf-life to the product. But the original pack had several drawbacks. First, the brine in which the peppercorns were packed was muddy and unappealing. Second, the customer could not see the spice through the pack. (It is pref-

erable when introducing a new spice on the market for the consumer to be able to see the product so that he becomes familiar with it.) Third, the tin itself did not always comply with Swedish packaging standards. The varnish on the inside often cracked, which sometimes gave the brine and the pepper a high metal content. The quality of the tins varied from one delivery to another. Fourth, once the tin was opened, the metal started to corrode. A more stable pack, preferably of glass, was therefore needed.

A major consideration was finding a new pack that would allow the consumer to use and store the pepper over a long period of time without having to transfer it to another container. We decided to adopt the packs that we were already using for capers. Capers are handled in much the same way as green pepper. The product has to be thoroughly rinsed, packed and then the pack filled with brine, which consists of de-ionized water and vinegar. Two of our four packs for capers were considered suitable for green pepper. The consumer pack chosen was a 75 dl glass jar containing 45 gr drained weight. For catering we decided to use a one-liter plastic jar with a net weight of 665 gr. A new brine was developed that would store the product for the required period of time.

These new packs had a few minor drawbacks—the taste of the new brine was

somewhat different from the old, and the vinegar added a slightly acid flavour. However these factors were not considered serious enough to prevent us from introducing the new packs.

Promotion

Once the new pack was ready we started on the promotional campaign. Promotional activities were directed at both consumers and the catering trade. Many persons were involved in this market development work—publicity specialists as well as food technologists.

Consumers: Swedish consumers knew very little about green pepper. White pepper, on the other hand, was used regularly in the household and black pepper was used for special types of cooking, such as barbecuing.

We therefore felt that a promotional campaign introducing this new pepper was essential.

In Sweden individual spices are not advertised to any great extent. The advertisements that are run usually promote the brand name of the spice company concerned or a group of spices. In this case our publicity served to promote the brand as well as the individual spice. A full-page ad was designed and run in three national daily newspapers, as well as in some major weekly magazines (see page 32). The advertisement emphasized that green pepper was different from white pepper and black pepper, which were more familiar to Swedish consumers. It described green pepper's characteristics and suggested how to use it.

Once consumers became interested in green pepper through the advertising campaign, they had to be taught how to use it. Some simple recipes involving the use of green pepper were therefore developed and printed in leaflet form. More than 200,000 copies of the leaflet were distributed to consumers through retail outlets (below).

Television was also used to promote to consumers. No advertising is allowed on Sweden's state-owned television network. However, we were lucky to get our green pepper used on a popular cooking programme. During one of the shows the cooking instructor gave a lesson on how to prepare pork cutlets with green pepper sauce. As Swedish television has a strong influence on consumption patterns in the country, this exposure helped introduce the pepper to a wide audience. We reprinted the recipe that had been used on the show as a simple handout, which we distributed to all major food stores.

Catering sector: The promotion to the catering sector was totally different. Green pepper was already known to a large part of this trade, although demand was not high. Our opinion was that if we succeeded in opening up the retail market, the catering sector would follow. We did not therefore develop a special campaign to promote the new one-liter pack to the catering sector. The pack was merely presented to the wholesalers, who promoted the sale of it. (In Sweden spices are sold to retail and catering establishments only through wholesalers. Practically no direct delivery takes place.)

Results

A company always has great expectations when introducing a new product. In this case our expectations were more than fulfilled. The sales results were good: The consumer pack caught on so well that we ran out of stock for a short period during the campaign. The catering pack caught on more slowly, as we had expected.

In the food-processing industry, the campaign instigated a strong movement to use green pepper in prepared foods. Many types of prepared products were spiced with it, such as flavoured butter, prepared stews, cheese, liver paste, minced meat (hamburger type), pâté, mustard, sauces (powdered and liquid) and sausage. Although some of these products have now disappeared from the market, others are still selling successfully.

The real surprise in the campaign was how much goodwill we created both for our company and above all for our brand name, "Santa Maria." This goodwill was built up not only among consumers but, perhaps more important, among persons

(continued on page 32)

Svartpeppar — Vitpeppar — Grönpeppar

De tre pepparna är mycket olika i smak och användning. Svartpeppar är den vanligaste och mest användade. Vitpeppar är mycket söt och används ofta i smaker och kryddor. Grönpeppar är mycket varm och används ofta i smaker och kryddor.

Svartpeppar är den vanligaste och mest användade. Den har en stark, varm smak och används ofta i smaker och kryddor. Den är också mycket användbar i matlagning.

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Santa Maria

Recipes using green pepper were distributed to consumers through retail outlets.

