
PACKAGING OF FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS

J. Bindu

Fish processing division

Email ID: *bindujaganath@gmail.com*

Packaging is crucial to our modern food distribution and marketing systems. Without protective packaging, food spoilage and wastage would increase tremendously. The advent of modern packaging technologies and new methods of packaging materials made possible the era of convenience products. In the past packaging emphasized the expectations of the producers and distributors but now it has shifted towards the consumer since they are becoming more demanding and aware of different choices to choose from. A food package usually provides a number of functions in addition to protection. Fish is one of the most perishable of all foods. The best package material cannot improve the quality of the contents and so the fish must be of high quality prior to processing and packaging. Different products have different packaging requirements and it is important to choose suitable packaging material accordingly. The intended storage conditions of the product, i.e., temperature, relative humidity and expected shelf life have to be known. Multilayered plastics are very popular since properties of different films can be effectively used to pack different products. The basic function of food packaging is to protect the product from physical damage and contaminants, to delay microbial spoilage, to allow greater handling and to improve presentation.

Types of Packaging Material

Glass

Glass containers have been used for many centuries and still one of the important food packaging material. Glass has its unique place in food packaging since it is strong, rigid and chemically inert. It does not appreciably deteriorate with age and offers excellent barrier to solids, liquids and gases. It also gives excellent protection against odour and flavor and product visibility. Glass can also be moulded to variety of shapes and sizes. But it has disadvantages like fragility, photo oxidation and heavier in weight.

Cans

Most frequently used container for packing food for canning is tin plate can. Tin plate containers made their appearance in 1810. The base steel used for making cans is referred as CMQ or can making quality steel. Corrosion behavior, strength and durability of the tin plate depend upon the chemical composition of the steel base. The active elements are principally

copper and phosphorous. The more of these elements present the greater the corrosiveness of steel. Cans are traditionally used for heat sterilized products and different types are standard tin plates, tin free steel and vacuum deposited aluminium on steel and aluminium cans. For food products packing they are coated inside to get desirable properties like acid resistance and sulphur resistance. But care has to be taken to avoid tainting of the lacquer.

Polymer coated two-piece cans of 6 oz capacity (307 x 109) with a universal polymer coating can be widely used for a variety of products. The can is made of Electrochemically chromium coated steel (ECCS) plate with clear polyethylene terephthalate (PET) coating on either side. The finished plate has a thickness of 0.19mm (0.15 mm of base steel + 20 μ PET coating on either side). The cans are made out of the steel plate by draw and redraw (DRD) process. The chromium coating along with the PET coating provides the can with a smooth, greyish, glistening appearance in addition to act as a barrier between the product and the base steel. The bottom of the can is designed for better stackability so that it can be stacked vertically without risk of toppling on the shelf. This also helps to reduce the storage space requirement for the cans. These cans are found to be suitable for thermal processing of fish and fish products. These cans are having easy open ends. Metal cans are advantageous as packages because of superior strength, high speed manufacturing and easy filling and dosing. Disadvantages of metal cans are weight, difficulty in reclosing and disposal.

Paper

A very considerable portion of packaged foods is stored and distributed in packages made out of paper or paper based materials. Because of its low cost, easy availability and versatility, paper is likely to retain its predominant position in packaging industries. Paper is highly permeable to gases, vapour and moisture and loses its strength when wet. Ordinary paper is not grease and oil resistant, but can be made resistant by mechanical processes during manufacturing.

Paper board

Thicker paper is called as paper board. There is not a clear cut dividing line between the heaviest grade of paper and the lightest board. The lightest standard board is 0.19 mm thick and heavy papers are of 0.125 mm thickness. Paper boards are used for making corrugated fibre board cartons.

Polymer Packaging

Plastics offer several advantages over other packaging materials since they are light in weight, flexible and offers resistant to cracking. Plastics have the advantage that most of them possess excellent physical properties such as strength and toughness. The requirements with a particular food may not be met with in a single packaging material, as it may not possess all the desired properties. In such cases copolymers or laminates consisting of two or more layers of different polymers having different properties can also be used.

Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE)

Most commonly used as it possesses qualities such as transparency, water vapour impermeability, heat sealability, chemical inertness and low cost of production. Organic vapours, oxygen and carbon dioxide permeabilities are high and has poor grease barrier property. Resists temperature between – 40°C to 85°C. Polyethylene (polythene, PE) is the material consumed in the largest quantity by the packaging industry.

High Density Polyethylene (HDPE)

HDPE resins are produced by low-pressure process. HDPE possesses a much more linear structure than LDPE and has up to 90% crystallinity, compared with LDPE which exhibits crystallinities as low as 50%. The material is stronger, thicker, less flexible and more brittle than LDPE and has lower permeability to gases and moisture. It has a higher softening temperature (121°C) and can therefore be heat sterilized. High molecular weight high density polythene (HM-HDPE) has very good mechanical strength, less creep and better environmental stress crack resistance property.

Linear Low Density Polythene (LLDPE)

Linear low density polythene is low density polythene produced by a low pressure process. Normal low density polythene has many $-C_5H_{11}$ side chains. These are absent in LLDPE, allowing the molecules to pack closer together to give a very tough resin. It is virtually free of long chain branches but does contain numerous short side chains. Generally, the advantages of LLDPE over LDPE are improved chemical resistance, improved performance at both low and high temperatures, higher surface gloss, higher strength at a given density and a greater resistance to environmental stress cracking. LLDPE shows improved puncture resistance and tear strength. The superior properties of LLDPE have led to its use in new applications for polyethylene as well as the replacement of LDPE and HDPE in some areas.

Polypropylene (PP)

Polypropylene is produced by the polymerisation of propylene. All PP films have permeability about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ that of polyethylene. It is stronger, rigid and lighter than polyethylene.

- **Cast polypropylene (CPP)**

It is an extruded, non oriented film and is characterized by good stiffness, grease and heat resistance and also has good moisture barrier. However, it is not a good gas barrier.

- **Oriented, Heat set Polypropylene (OPP):**

Orientation can be in one direction (unbalanced) or in two directions equally (balanced). The resulting film is characterized by good low temperature durability, high stiffness and excellent moisture vapour transmission rate. One drawback of OPP is its low tensile strength.

Polystyrene

The material is manufactured from ethylene and benzene, which are cheap. The polymer is

normally atactic and it is thus completely amorphous because of the bulky nature of the benzene rings prevents a close approach of the chains. The material offers reasonably good barrier to gases but is a poor barrier to water vapour. New applications of polystyrene involve coextrusion with barrier resins such as EVOH and poly vinylidene chloride copolymer to produce thermoformed, wide mouthed containers for shelf stable food products and multi layer blow moulded bottles. To overcome the brittleness of polystyrene, synthetic rubbers can be incorporated at levels generally not exceeding 14% w/w. High impact polystyrene is an excellent material for thermoforming. Co-polymerisation with other polymers like acrylonitrile butadiene improves the flexibility. Since it is crystal clear and sparkling, it is used in blister packs and as a breathing film for packaging fresh produce. These materials have low heat sealability and often tend to stick to the jaws of heat sealer. *Polyester*

Polyester can be produced by reacting ethylene glycol with terephthalic acid. Polyester film's outstanding properties as a food packaging material are its great tensile strength, low gas permeability, excellent chemical resistance, lightweight, elasticity and stability over a wide range of temperature (-60° to 220°C). The latter property has led to the use of PET for boil in the bag products which are frozen before use and as over bags where they are able to withstand cooking temperatures without decomposing.

Although many films can be metallized, polyester is the most commonly used one. Metallization results in considerable improvement in barrier properties. A fast growing application for polyester is ovenable trays for frozen food and prepared meals. They are preferable to foil trays for these applications because of their ability to be micro wave processed without an outer board carton.

Polyamides (Nylon)

Polyamides are condensation products of diacids and diamine. The first polyamide produced was Nylon-6,6 made from adipic acid and hexamethylene diamine. Various grades of nylons are available. Nylon-6 is easy to handle and is abrasion-resistant. Nylon-11 and nylon-12 have superior barrier properties against oxygen and water and have lower heat seal temperatures. However, nylon-6,6 has a high melting point and hence, it is difficult to heat seal. Nylons are strong, tough, highly crystalline materials with high melting and softening points. High abrasion resistance and low gas permeability are other characteristic properties.

Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)

The monomer is made by the addition of reaction between acetylene and hydrochloric acid. It must be plasticised to obtain the required flexibility and durability. Films with excellent gloss and transparency can be obtained provided that the correct stabilizer and plasticizer are used. Thin plasticized PVC film is widely used in supermarkets for the stretch wrapping of trays containing fresh red meat and produce. The relatively high water vapour transmission rate of PVC prevents condensation on the inside of the film. Oriented films are used for shrink-

wrapping of produce and fresh meat. Unplasticized PVC as a rigid sheet material is thermoformed to produce a wide range of inserts from chocolate boxes to biscuit trays. Unplasticized PVC bottles have better clarity, oil resistance and barrier properties than those made from polyethylene. They have made extensive penetration into the market for a wide range of foods including fruit juices and edible oils.

Copolymers

When polythene resins are being manufactured it is possible to mix other monomers with ethylene so that these are incorporated in the polymer molecules. These inclusions alter the characteristics of the polythene. Vinyl acetate is commonly used and the resulting ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) copolymers display better sealing than modified polythene. Butyl acetate is incorporated with similar effects.

Aluminium foil

Aluminum foil is defined as a solid sheet section rolled to a thickness less than 0.006 inches. Aluminum has excellent properties like thermal conductivity, light weight, corrosion resistance, grease and oil resistance, tastelessness, odourlessness, heat and flame resistance, opacity and non-toxicity. Aluminum foil free from defects is a perfect moisture and oxygen barrier. In all flexible packaging applications using aluminum foil where good moisture and oxygen barrier properties are important, the foil is almost always combined with heat sealing media such as polythene or polypropylene. It is the cheapest material to use for the properties obtained. Foils of thickness 8 to 40 microns are generally used in food packaging. Foil as such is soft and susceptible for creasing. Hence, foil is generally used as an inner layer.

Packaging of fresh fish

A suitable package for fresh fish should keep the fish moist and prevent dehydration, retard chemical and bacterial spoilage, provide a barrier against moisture and oxygen to reduce fat oxidation and prevent permeation of external odors. Generally baskets made of split bamboo, palmyrah leaf and similar plant materials were traditionally used for packing fresh iced fish. However, they do not possess adequate mechanical strength and get deformed under stacking. The porous surface of these containers tends to absorb water and accumulate slime, creating an ideal breeding ground for spoilage bacteria, which can contaminate the fish. Even though washing cleans the contaminated surfaces of the container it has been shown to be ineffective in reducing the bacterial load significantly. Sharp edges of bamboo also cause bruises on the skin of fish. Used tea chests provided with 2.5 cm thick foamed polystyrene slabs inside have been found extremely beneficial for transport of fish over long distances up to 60 h duration.

Modern insulated containers are made of HDPE or polypropylene with polyurethane insulation sandwiched between the inner and outer walls of the double walled containers. They are durable and in normal use have a life span of over 5 years. Materials such as aluminium, steel

and fibreglass are also used in the construction of insulated containers. Insulation properties of these containers depend on the integrity of the layer of insulation. Contamination of insulation layer with water drastically reduces insulation properties of the medium. An insulated corrugated polypropylene container which is the lightest of all packages is used for iced fish transport. It lasts for 5 trips and being of collapsible design and lightweight, return of empty container is very easy. The use of fibreboard containers for the transportation of iced fish and frozen fish showed that fish could be transported in good with effective insulation.

Packaging of frozen fish

World trade in frozen fishery products has been increasing every year. Fish being highly perishable transportation and storage of frozen fishery products requires a cold chain and these fishery products are to be stored at temperatures below -18°C . Fishery products are frozen at -40°C . However cold storage temperature where they are subsequently stored varies from -30 to -18°C . The enzymatic activities bring about deteriorative changes like rancidity in frozen fish products. Exposure to low temperatures for a long time may result in freezer burns. Hence for extending shelf life and further storage, packaging is of absolute importance. To get a quality frozen product in perfect condition the package must provide protection against dehydration, oxidation, flavour and odour loss and physical changes. Evaporation of moisture from the surface of the fish may occur resulting in freezer burns. In order to overcome these problems suitable packaging is absolutely necessary. The advantages of packaging frozen fish are, prevention of dehydration, prevention of rancidity in fatty fishes, protection against contamination and physical damages, convenience of handling the product and using a portion of the product, retention of flavour and colour attractive appearance of the product and to allow pack for thawing without leaching.

Primary wrap for block frozen products

The material used as a primary wrap for contact with the food is mainly Low-density polythene (LDPE). This can be in the shape of a bag or a film. Usually 2 kg or 5 lbs fish is packed along with 10-20 % glaze. Glazing should be optimum at the recommended level, since this will add to cost and weight during packaging and transportation. Alternately, films of high molecular weight high-density polyethylene (HM-HDPE), which is not as transparent as LDPE film are also used being more cost effective. 100 gauge LDPE is used for wrap while 200 gauge is used for bag. The corresponding values for HDPE are 60 and 120 gauge. Polythene films should be of food grade conforming to IS: 9845 specifications.

Duplex carton/ Inner carton

There are four types of cartons used for packaging of seafood products, which are top opening, end opening, end loading and tray type. In top opening carton system filling is done from the top. This is mainly for filling larger pieces of fish and cephalopods. End opening type cartons are used when the product is smaller and free flowing, like packaging of fish curry or

soup. Here the carton is coated with polyethylene on both the inside and outside. The end loading system feeds the product from one end into a horizontal glued carton. End flaps are heat sealed or closed by tucks in flap. End loading is suitable for products packed in aluminium /carton trays. Tray type cartons consist of cartons systems/ polypropylene trays, which are sealed with a lid and used for production of frozen pre cooked food that will be heated and thawed in the package itself. To withstand heating, the board is coated with polypropylene.

The frozen blocks are wrapped in film and then packed in duplex cartons. A number of such blocks are packed in a master poly bag and then packed into master cartons. The carton should have details like net weight, type and size, name and address of the producer and the country of origin.

Master carton

In the case of frozen shrimps about 6 units of 2 kg each or 10 units of 2 kg each are packed into master cartons. Corrugated fiberboards are used for the packaging of frozen fish. They may be of virgin material and having three or five ply with liners. The cartons may be wax coated or supported with liner paper with higher wet strength to make it moisture resistant. The specifications for master carton vary depending upon the country or the type of pack.

Strapping and tying

Boxes are now mainly closed at the top and bottom by using cellophane tapes. They are also stapled or strapped by using polypropylene / high density/ rayon extruded straps. The straps are clipped or heat-sealed. The tensile strength must be great enough to withstand the load. For polypropylene the fluctuations in the tensile strength and elongation at break (%) at – 20°C are comparatively less. Hence this material is most suitable when compared to HDPE where the tensile strength and elongation at break vary.

Packaging of Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) Products

Packaging requirements of IQF shrimps vary from those of block frozen. IQF shrimps are mainly packed for retail marketing in consumer packs ranging from 100g to 5 kg. An IQF pack has a single glaze on its surface and because of the larger surface area, they are vulnerable to several risk. Essential characteristics required for packaging materials of IQF shrimps are

- Low water vapour transmission rate to reduce the risk of dehydration
- Low gas/oxygen permeability, thereby reducing the risk of oxidation and changes in colour, flavour and odour
- Flexibility to fix the contours of the food
- Resistance to puncture, brittleness and deterioration at low temperatures.
- Ease of filling

IQF shrimps are filled in primary containers along with code slip and weighed. Bar coding is nowadays adopted which will depict various product and inventory details through a series of bars. Bar coding is compulsory for products imported to the EEC and US markets. The

product is filled into primary pack which heat sealed and further it is packed in master cartons for storage and transportation. The primary pack may be plastic film pouches (monofilm co-extruded film or laminated pouches). The unit pouches may be provided with unit/intermediate cartons or directly packed into master cartons. The unit/intermediate cartons are made of duplex or three ply corrugated fibreboard laminated with plastic film on the inside and outside to improve the functional properties as well as aesthetic value of the pack. The most functional cost effective film has been identified as 10 μ biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP). Some duplex cartons are also wax-coated. One major requirement of the master carton is high compression strength to bear weight without damage to the product. Compression strength of 500 kg is the minimum recommended specification, which might give reasonable safety to the product. The cartons are made of 5 or 7 ply corrugated fibreboard.

Battered and Breaded fish products

This forms an important class of value added products in convenience form. The battering and breading process increase the bulk of the product thus reducing the cost element. A number of value added marine products both for export and internal markets can be prepared from shrimp, squids, cuttle fish, certain species of fish and minced meat from low priced fishes. The changes taking place during frozen storage of the value added products are desiccation, discoloration, development of rancidity etc. Application of proper packaging prevents/retards these changes and enhances shelf life. Conventional packaging materials like flexible plastic films alone are not suitable for these products as they provide little mechanical protection to the products and as a result the products get damaged or broken during handling and transportation. Hence, thermoformed containers are commonly used for this purpose. The thermoformed trays produced from food grade materials are suitable for the packaging of value added fishery products both for internal and export markets. Trays made of materials like PVC, HIP and HDPE are unaffected by low temperature of frozen storage and provide protection to the contents against desiccation, oxidation etc. during prolonged storage.

Dry fish

Traditionally, coconut leaf baskets, palmyrah leaf baskets, jute sacks and news paper baskets have been used for packing and transportation of dried fish. These containers only help in transportation of the fish. They do not protect or preserve the fish. The dry fish packed in such containers have a very short shelf life and is usually not of good quality. These fishes are often found to be rancid or have mould growth. Since the packaging is permeable, the product absorbs moisture and gets soggy. Hence these packaging materials afford least protection to the product. Plywood boxes and waxed corrugated cartons are also used for packing large quantities. High density polythene woven gusseted bags laminated with 100 gauge low

density polythene are suitable for packaging dried fish. HDPE is impervious to microbial and insect attack. HDPE is a material which will not spoil even if it gets wet. It is hard and translucent and has high tensile strength.

Table.1. Bulk packaging materials and their properties

Type	Merits	Demerits
Waxed corrugated cartons	Handy, light, hygienic and presentable	Very delicate, Not foolproof against insects, rodents, moisture, breakage
Dealwood or Plywood boxes	Compact and strong, Larger quantities can be packed, handling, transportation and stacking are easy, Can be reused, Protection against damage	Comparatively heavy, Cost is high, Cheap wood not easily available
Bamboo baskets	Handy, light, Not costly	Very delicate, Not foolproof against insects, rodents, moisture, breakage
Gunny bag	Light, handy, cheap, proof against breakage	Not foolproof against insects, rodents, moisture, Not hygienic
Dried palmyrah and coconut palm leaves	Cheapest of all and readily available in the coastal regions of India	Not foolproof against insects, rodents, moisture, Not hygienic and does not give good appearance, Packing is laborious
Multiwall paper sack lined with 300 gauge LDPE	Hygienic, presentable and can be printed	Costly, polythene lining may break during handling and hence is not foolproof against insects, rodents, moisture
HDPE woven gusseted bags laminated with 100 gauge LDPE	Hygienic, presentable and can be printed, Stackable, can be packed uniformly	

In the consumer market the dried fish is packed in low-density polyethylene or polypropylene. Due to the high moisture content of about 35 % in certain salted fishes they are often attacked by microbes. Hence fish should be dried to a moisture level of 25 % or below. Packets of different sizes and weights ranging from 50g up to 2 kg and bulk packs are available.

Nowadays monolayer and multilayer films, combination and co extruded films are used for bulk packing and consumer packaging of dry fish. Polyester polythene laminates and thermoform containers are used to pack dried prawns and value added dried products.

Table 2: Consumer packaging of dry fish

Material Composition	Merits	Demerits
250 gauge low density polyethylene film	Cheap, readily available, good bursting and tearing strength and heat sealability	High water vapour and gas transmission rate, easy to puncture due to sharp spines, smell comes out. Shelf life limited.
250 gauge polypropylene film	Cheap, readily available, good bursting and tearing strength and heat sealability	High water vapour and gas transmission rate, easy to puncture due to sharp spines Shelf life is limited.
300MXXT Cellophane/150 gauge LDPE	Very low water vapour and gas transmission rate, transparent, good bursting and tearing strength , heat sealability and long shelf life.	Prone to easy attack by insects, costly.
12 micron plain polyester/150 g low density polyethylene	Very low water vapour and gas transmission rate, transparent, good bursting strength, puncture resistance & heat sealability. No insect penetration	Costlier
20micron Nylon laminated with 150 gauge polyethylene	Very low water vapour and gas transmission rate, transparent, good bursting strength, puncture resistance & heat sealability. No insect penetration	Costlier

In consumer packaging 100 to 700 gauge LDPE and PP were found suitable for storing dry fish. It also showed that dry fish when packed in films of higher gauge remained in good

condition for a longer period. This is mainly due to the low water vapour transmission rate and oxygen transmission rate, which decrease with increase in thickness. In the case of overall quality 200, 300 and 400 gauge LDPE films also showed promising results. The advantages of low density polythene are clarity, low water vapour transmission rate, good bursting and tearing strength and heat sealing capacity. The main disadvantage is the high gas transmission rate which is undesirable in dried fish packaging because the smell dissipates to the surrounding atmosphere.

Dry shell on prawns are packed mostly in duplex cartons or polystyrene trays and then covered with a laminate film. This is mainly due to the fact the spines will puncture the packaging material. Polypropylene pouches of 300 gauge are recommended for salted fishery products with moisture content of 35% and above for obtaining a shelf life of 6 months. The advantages being good clarity, Low WVTR, good bursting strength and tearing strength. Currently laminate films of Polyester/polythene are mostly used for packaging of dried fish. Polyester films are capable of giving good mechanical strength and reverse colour printing can also be done. Polythene is heat sealable and has good food contact application. The keeping quality of dry fish can be enhanced in an air-conditioned room where the temperature and humidity is low.

Dry fish is irregular in shape and size leading to great difficulty in packing. They have spines and projections which may puncture the packaging materials. In the case of jute bags because of its permeable nature, salted fish may absorb moisture depending on the relative humidity of the environment. In the coastal place where RH is always above 80 % this invariably takes place making the fish wet. Thus a suitable packaging material will ensure protection against migration of moisture and oxygen, and odour and insect attacks.

Accelerated freeze dried (AFD)

AFD products demand a very high price in the export trade. The final moisture content of AFD products generally is about 2 %. Low moisture content and large surface area make these foods extremely hygroscopic. Most dried products deteriorate when exposed to oxygen. Changes in colour may also take place as a result of bleaching. Light accelerates oxidative reactions and hence contact with light should be prevented. If proper packaging materials are not used there is every chance that the materials may undergo flavour changes due to the oxidation of the product and also migration of flavour from the packaging material. Since, fish contains fat there may be also a chance of it taking up the taints from the packaging material. The particular structural properties of freeze-dried products lead to damage by mechanical means. The light porous nature causes them to be very fragile and easily prone to breakage during handling and transportation. Freeze dried products are also liable to damage caused by free movement within the package. Measures must be taken to fit the product compactly in the container, while leaving the minimum headspace for filling inert gas.

Rigid containers both glass and cans were used earlier for packaging of freeze dried products. However, now metallised polyester laminated with polythene or aluminum foil /paper/polythenes are used since they have low oxygen transmission rate and water vapour transmission rate. Most of the packages are filled with an inert gas. The product can also be packed under vacuum to give better protection against damage.

Packaging of thermal process fish products

Retort pouches consist of three or four layers consisting of an outer polyester layer, a middle aluminum layer and an inner cast polypropylene layer. Aluminium foil is the barrier layer which gives the product a longer shelf life. Polypropylene has a high melting point of about 138°C and is used as the inner layer to provide critical seal integrity, flexibility, strength, taste and odour compatibility with a wide range of products. The different layers are held together with adhesives which are usually modified polyolefins such as ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA). Some pouches contain polyvinylidene chloride, ethylene vinyl alcohol or nylon instead of the aluminium layer to permit viewing of the product. These are foil free laminated materials. These plastics are good barriers to oxygen molecules but are not complete barriers and therefore the shelf life is reduced. There are mainly two types of retort pouches viz, preformed and pouches which are made from laminates on the process line. Preformed retort pouches are more commonly used and they are filled manually or by using automatic filling machines. Sauces and curry products are packed instantaneously in pouches that are produced from laminated rolls which are simultaneously formed, filled and sealed. In case of products with solid contents, either pouch are filled with solids together with some liquid and sealed using a vacuum sealing machine. Once the product is filled and sealed it is then subjected to temperatures of 121.1°C with counter pressure so that the cold point or slowest heating point within the food reaches the predetermined time temperature integral.

Fish pickles

Fish pickle is a value added item whose bulk is contributed by low value items like ginger, chilly, acetic acid etc. Generally low cost fish, clam meat is used in fish pickles. Conventionally glass bottles are used as containers, which offer properties like inertness, non-toxicity, durability, non-permeability to gases, moisture etc. But they are heavy, prone to break, voluminous and expensive. New flexible packaging materials developed for fish pickle is based on plain polyester laminated with LDPE-HDPE Co-extruded film or Nylon/Surlyn or LD/BA/Nylon/BA/Primacore. These are inert to the product, can be attractively fabricated as stand up packs and can be printed on the reverse side of the polyester film.

Fish soup powder

Fish soup powder is a speciality product containing partially hydrolysed fish, protein, carbohydrates, fat and several other seasonings including salt. The product is hygroscopic and hence the selection of the package assumes great significance. Appropriate package

developed for such products are 12 micron plain polyester laminated with LDPE-HDPE co-extruded film or 90-100 micron LD/BA/Nylon/BA/Primacore multilayer films which ensure a safe storage of the product up to six months.

Extruded products

Ready to eat breakfast cereals, pasta, ready-to-eat, snacks, pet foods, and textured vegetable protein (TVP) are prepared by the extrusion process. An extruder consists of one or two screws rotating a stationary barrel and the mixed raw material is fed from one end and comes out through a die at the other end where it gets puffed up due to the release of steam. It is either in the ready to eat form and hence have to be hygienically packed for consumption. The extruded products are highly hygroscopic in nature and hence they should not come into contact with moisture. Since the extruded product contains fat, the product should not be exposed to air. It is also highly brittle and may powder when crushed. Hence packaging films of high barrier strength and low permeability to oxygen and water vapour are required. Generally extruded products are packed in LDPE/metallised polyester laminated pouches flushed with Nitrogen.

Surimi and surimi based products

Surimi is an intermediate product / raw material for processing several value added products like fabricated foods, shrimp and crab analogues and a variety of other products. Surimi requires to be preserved frozen until used for processing different products. surimi is generally frozen as rectangular blocks. In order to prevent oxidative rancidity and desiccation care has to be taken to ensure that the frozen block does not contain any voids and that the packaging materials used have low water vapour permeability and low permeability to gases and odours. The packaging materials employed should be sufficiently strong and durable to withstand stress during handling, storage and distribution. LDPE and HDPE packaging films employed for block frozen shrimp are considered safe for surimi.

Fish Sausage

Fish sausage is a minced based product. Surimi is the base material, which is homogenised after mixing with several other ingredients. The homogenised mass is stuffed in synthetic casings like Ryphan (Rubber hydrochloride) or Kurehalon (Vinylidene chloride). The casing is closed using metal rings after which it is heated in water at 85-90°C and then slowly cooled. After drying the sausage is wrapped in cellophane laminated with polythene. Fish sausage is kept at refrigerator temperatures for retail; however when prolonged storage is needed it is better kept frozen. Fish sausage is also processed in polyamide and cellulose and fibrous casing. For thermal processing polypropylene casings are used so as to withstand high temperatures.

Glucosamine hydrochloride

D-Glucosamine hydrochloride is used to cure rheumatic arthritis, and is also used as an additive in the food & cosmetic industry. D-Glucosamine hydrochloride Powder is stored in a cool and dry well-closed container, the temperature should be lower than 25°C, and the relative humidity should not exceed 50%. Glucosamine is packed in polybottle, namely PP or HDPE of 1kg, 500g and 20 g, 1kg metallised bag, 25kg in drums for commercial use and smaller quantities are packed in auto sample vials.

Chitin and Chitosan

Chitin and chitosan are derived from prawn shell waste and is exported in large quantities. The product should be protected against moisture gain as well as microbial and insect attacks. Bulk packaging of chitosan is done in HDPE woven gusseted bag laminated with 100 gauge LDPE liner. Chitosan is also marketed in capsule forms for consumption. Capsules made of gelatin are used for filling chitosan. Since chitosan is in the powdered form or flakes they are filled into the capsules. A particular numbers of capsules are then placed in HDPE containers.

Fish Hydrolysate

Fish Hydrolysate is prepared from fish mince which has contain oil and is undiluted, and so is a richer food source for beneficial microbes and especially beneficial fungi in the soil. It is generally cold-processed and hence retains the amino acids and protein chains as such. Fish hydrolysate is concentrated, and when diluted can be used ideally as soil fertiliser, and is suitable for all soils, crops, ornamentals, trees and vegetables It contains a wide spectrum of major nutrients and trace elements in organic, plant available form. It can be used as a foliar spray, but since the oil is present it may show patches on the leaves. The liquid is generally packed in jars or cans which are made of polypropylene or HDPE.

Fish Meal

Fish meal is a source of high quality protein (60%) and is also a rich in omega-3 essential fatty acids EPA and DHA due to the high fat content. Incorporation of DHA and EPA in fish meal will in turn ensure its concentration in the diets of fish and poultry, ultimately reaching the human diet. Hence the packaging should be impermeable to moisture, oxygen and other insets and pests. Fish meal is generally packed in HDPE sacks for bulk transportation. The fishmeal whether in ground or pelletised form should contain moisture 6-12 %. The fat content should not exceed 18% and the final meal should contain at least 100 ppm antioxidant (ethoxyquin). If the temperature exceeds°130 F or 55° C then the ventilation should be kept on hold. The fish meal is generally packed in jute bags, multiwall paper bag which are lined with polythene and in HDPE woven bags with liner.

Fish oils

Fish oils are highly unsaturated and easily susceptible to oxidation when exposed to air. Hence they have to be packed in containers which have high barrier properties which are moisture proof, oil resistant and impermeable to oxygen. Larger quantities of fish oil are mainly packed

in LLDE/Nylon films or in glass bottles. Bulk transportation food grade flexitanks made of 4 layered polyethylene and tubular PP. Advantages of using flexitanks are that they can carry 50% more than bottles and therefore will save on storage space, packaging and transportation cost.

Fish oil is also marketed for regular oral dosage in the form softgel capsules. The shell is made of gelatin, water, glycerol or sorbitol. The process of encapsulation is by using the rotary die encapsulation process. The encapsulation process is a FFS operation. Two flat gelatin ribbons manufactured on the machine are brought together on a twin set of rotating dies that contain recesses in the desired size and shape, these cuts out the ribbon into a two-dimensional shape, and form a seal around the outside. At the same time a pump delivers a precise dose of oil through a nozzle incorporated into a filling wedge whose tip sits between the two ribbons in between two die pockets at the point of cut out. The wedge is heated to facilitate the sealing process. The wedge injection causes the two flat ribbons to expand into the die pockets, giving rise to the three-dimensional finished product. After encapsulation, the soft gels are further dried depending on the product. They are then further packed in glass or plastic bottles. The soft gels are also packed as blister packs.

Fish silage

Fish silage is a product made from whole fish or parts of the fish which are mainly processing discards and to which an acid is added. The liquefaction of the fish is brought about by enzymes inherent in the fish. The product is a stable liquid and contains all the water present in the original material. Hence it is in the liquid form. Fish silage is generally stored in huge drums or polycontainers so that they can be transported.

Shark fin rays

Dried shark fin is a traditionally exported item from India. Significant value addition is possible if the rays from the shark fins are extracted and exported in place of shark fins. With the indigenous development of inexpensive and simple technology for extraction of fin rays, export of fin rays have picked up. Moisture resistant packaging having good puncture resistance and sufficient mechanical strength to withstand the hazards of transportation are the major requirements in the packaging employed for shark fin rays. Polyester / polythene laminates or Nylon based co-extruded films having good puncture resistance are appropriate for shark fin rays. Traditionally dried shark fins are packed as bulk pack in jute sacks. The improved bulk pack consists of high-density polythene woven sack or polypropylene woven sack.

Suggested Reading

1. Gordon L. Robertson (2006). Food Packaging -Principles and Practice, CRC Press, Taylor and Francis, Boca Raton, FL.
2. Kerry. P.J (2013). Advances in meat, poultry and seafood packaging. Woodhead Publishing Ltd. UK.