



PHOTO: SNORRE FOOD

Importing more than 4,000 tonnes of premium cold water seafood, Frank Arne Næsheim's Singapore-based Snorre Food is one of Asia's leading suppliers.

## An Ocean of Food

SOFIE LISBY

**T**here is no doubt in Frank Næsheim's mind about the reasons for his company's continued success in Asia. His background as a chef has given him thorough knowledge and understanding of the needs and inner workings of Singapore and wider Asia's food industry, as well as the ability to follow trends.

"I started a Scandinavian seafood restaurant, Vikings, in Singapore in 1987 with a partner," recalls Frank Næsheim. "We quickly found that if we wanted to get the same quality of seafood that we were used to in Norway, we would have to import it ourselves. After a while we started to get enquiries from other chefs in Singapore who wanted to know if they could buy the products and soon the hotels followed. After that we started to get calls from Hong Kong, Jakarta and Bangkok and that's how we started to export to other countries and I began to spend more time travelling around selling and promoting our products.

"I guess it was a combination of a few things but being able to connect with the chefs and offering products of a superior quality than what chefs were used to definitely gave us an advantage in the beginning. There was unmet demand in the market, Norwegian seafood was popular and we were able to give them a solution and a package that worked.

The restaurant has since closed but Snorre Food has grown to become one of Asia's leading suppliers of cold water seafood. The company has a small retail outlet at their headquarters in Singapore and supplies a select group of retail stores

but the vast majority of trade is business to business. Importing more than 4000 tonnes of fresh and frozen seafood every year, Frank Næsheim's clients include all the major regional airlines, including Singapore Airlines, Thai Airways, Cathay Pacific and Korean Air, as well as high profile gourmet restaurants in Singapore, such as Andre, Burnt Ends and Iggy's.

"We have a regular shipment infrastructure in place," explains Frank Næsheim. "We have three shipments per week of seafood from Denmark, Scotland, Japan and New Zealand, anywhere that has cold water, basically. We have stock in Singapore so we are able to offer our clients a total solution. Being based in Singapore, where the infrastructure and transport networks work so well, means we can respond very fast. If our clients want frozen products we can deliver with one day's notice, and if they want it fresh, we have certain stock here in Singapore and every two days we have new stock coming in. If it makes more sense, we can even bring the products directly from Norway to Bangkok or other cities in Asia.

"In addition, we have five chefs working in the company, including myself, who travel around to do

promotion and write menus. We make life easier for the chefs; they want to be the hero in their organisation and their countries, and we make them look like heroes. We supply the seafood, we supply the recipe and we can even go and cook it for them. Some chefs like that solution."

While Frank Næsheim's background as a chef may have helped him, outside factors have played their part too. "Asia has become more sophisticated," says Frank Næsheim. "The region is more developed and dining trends have changed – there is growing demand and we can meet that demand all year so we take away some of the seasonality that has in the past limited the supply of high quality seafood. We have good infrastructure. Then of course there is the demographics of Asia, there is a huge population with a preference for seafood and we supply a healthy and sustainable product. Big parts of the world have problems with their fish populations while in Norway we have responsible and well managed fisheries. Sustainability has become really important so Norwegian seafood enjoys a really strong position in the market with people and chefs recognising the quality. It's a combination of all these factors that make Norwegian seafood a success story."

Snorre Food works with the Norwegian Seafood Council to promote Norway as a premier seafood producing country. Part of that is highlighting the qualities of Norwegian seafood and educating customers about its origin. "We regard ourselves as a cold water seafood specialist," explains Frank Næsheim. "Sixty percent of our products come from Norway and part of our marketing strategy is to highlight the cold, clear waters of the country and the impact the water has on the quality of the fish. Also, we have one of the most advanced and well managed fish farming industries in



PHOTO: SNORRE FOOD

the world, giving us economy of scale and allowing us to cut cost.”

Snorre Food recently hosted its annual seafood dinner in Singapore. Held annually for almost two decades, the dinner has become one of the highlights on the social calendar and the 1000 tickets sell out in just one day. Apart from being a monumental logistical feat, the dinner is also an opportunity for Snorre Food to showcase its products.

“The seafood dinner has grown to become a big sell out dinner,” says Frank Næsheim. “We have also done similar dinners in Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Bangkok but the one in Singapore is the biggest and most prestigious for us because we are on home ground and we can do technically difficult things. We are using almost two tonnes of Norwegian seafood on one buffet. I don’t think there is a buffet anywhere in the world with this scale of seafood. We have 100 seafood dishes on that buffet, we have the whole range of products on offer.

“The purpose with these dinners is to prove that Norwegian seafood can be

used in any kind of cuisine in the world. We basically want to tell people, “We have the best seafood in the world but Asia has the most interesting and exciting cuisine and if you merge two, you get fantastic dishes.” That’s the message we want to send – to the chefs to the public.”

Celebrating 30 years of business next year, Frank Næsheim is bullish about the future. “We are located in the right place at the right time,” he says. “The demographics are right for us; more people in this region can afford our product so overall the market is good. Demand for fresh seafood is increasing and the supply of wild catch in this part of the world will not be able to keep up. So you have to import it. Also, we are in a place with political stability and the infrastructure is good.

“Part of our strategy going forward is to provide more value adding services. We’re not keen to go into main stream retail, we want to develop and improve where we are already strong and where we have an advantage and where our competitors will have a hard time to

follow. Twenty-nine years of contacts and networking with the industry is tough to imitate. Everybody can fight on price but not everybody can click with the chefs like we do. That’s the backbone of our service.” ■

**Facts**

- Snorre Food imports around 4,000 tonnes of seafood into Singapore every year. The majority of that is Norwegian farmed salmon, 35 percent of which is fresh, 65 percent frozen.
- The second largest import in volume is saba mackerel, which is mainly frozen.
- Snorre Food is certified as HACCP (Hazard Analyses Critical Control Point) and ISO 22000 compliant, which are strict international standards of hygiene and freshness.
- Snorre Food headquarters are located in Singapore’s Jurong district, comprising FISK, a specialty seafood showroom and distribution facility, as well as a HACCP and ISO 22000 certified production facility.



PHOTO: NORWEGIAN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION (SINGAPORE)

Above: Chef Team at the Seafood Dinner in Singapore on 4 March 2016. The team of Chefs including Frank Næsheim, Eyvind Hellstrøm, Gunnar Jensen, Erik Teo, Damian Tan and Robert Stirrup. Left: From FISK, Snorre Food’s premium seafood outlet in Singapore. Above left: Snorre Food CEO, Frank Næsheim.