

Staying Above Sea Level

The SeaWell packaging system extends shelf life and improves food safety of seafood by separating the product from the excess liquid it releases.

MAYA NORRIS MANAGING EDITOR

APTAR FOOD + BEVERAGE intends to enhance the freshness of packaged seafood from sea to table with its latest active packaging system. The Crystal Lake, Ill.-based company developed SeaWell, packaging designed to separate seafood from excess liquid in order to mitigate microbial growth, prevent breakdown of the product, and extend shelf life.

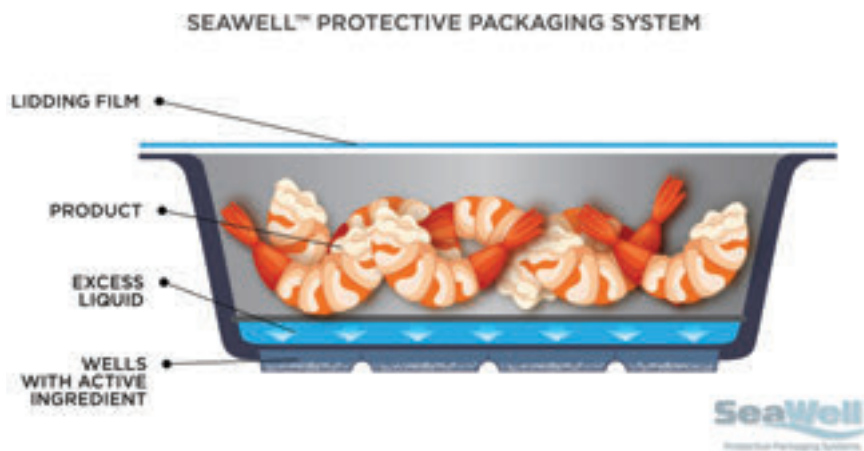
SeaWell features integrated technology that absorbs excess liquid that would otherwise accumulate around the seafood. The packaging consists of a tray made out of recyclable PP with cavities at the bottom. A proprietary blend of direct food-contact-safe powder is placed in the cavities and secured with a nonwoven fabric heat-sealed over the cavities. The powder, which is GRAS (generally recognized as safe) certified by FDA, absorbs excess liquid that the seafood releases and traps the liquid in the wells of the tray, keeping the liquid away from the seafood. The company also makes a pouch version of SeaWell, in which pillow pockets in the back of the pouch contain the powder. They are typically used to package odd-shaped seafood, such as crab legs or whole fish. The packaging is available in a variety of sizes for retail and foodservice.

Reeling in results

Because SeaWell prevents the seafood product from sitting in excess liquid, the packaging reduces the rate of microbial growth and chemical degradation. According to the studies Aptar has conducted, SeaWell averages a 1-log (90%) reduction in bacteria.

In addition to absorbing odor and maintaining the product's visual appeal, SeaWell also extends the shelf life of the seafood product compared to foam trays with diaper pads and plastic overwraps, bucket packaging, net bags, and other traditional seafood packaging. For example, Aptar says SeaWell packaging can increase the shelf life of mussels by 15% and oysters by 70%. SeaWell can also extend the shelf life of lobster meat by four days and fish roe by 5 days, according to the company.

"Between the liquid absorption and the patented tray design, the food product itself is kept up and away, completely separated from the purge [of liquid]," says Christa Biggs, manager of business devel-



opment at Aptar. "So whether it's a fresh food product that naturally sits in a pool of its own liquid or a frozen product that you thaw in the tray, the design and absorption keeps the product up and away from that liquid. So you get product integrity, freshness extension, shelf life extension."

SeaWell offers a range of other benefits as the packaged seafood product makes its way from manufacturer to retailer to consumer. The technology enables seafood processors to pack frozen for distribution and thaw in the same package, allowing them to reach further geographic markets and decrease food waste. The extended shelf life also means retailers can increase sales and reduce shrink. And by trapping the excess liquid in the wells of the packaging, consumers don't have to deal with messy leaking packages and possible cross-contamination in the kitchen when preparing meals.

A national retail chain is using SeaWell in more than 4,000 stores, but Aptar declined to mention the name of the retailer. According to Aptar, the retailer chose to package its seafood products in SeaWell to help cultivate a high-quality seafood brand. "Their goal was to improve their seafood category," Biggs says. "They were not previously known as a place to shop for fresh and quality seafood, and they're trying to change that image. And it's working." **PFW**

Aptar Food + Beverage
www.aptar.com/food-beverage

SeaWell prevents excess liquid from accumulating around the seafood by using a proprietary blend of direct food-contact-safe powder placed in the cavities at the bottom of the tray that absorbs the liquid the product releases and traps it there.

Photo courtesy of Aptar Food + Beverage.