

From a remote island to shelves around the world: the story of Azorean canned fish

NEWS ARTICLE

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Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

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Canned smoked ray
© Tibério Barbeito

The island of Terceira in the Azores lies 1,500 km west of mainland Portugal – remote enough to make running a business complicated, let alone one built on delivering fresh fish to distant markets. **Tibério Barbeito** started **TZT Flying Fish Azores** in his twenties

with exactly that ambition. Ten years later, with EU funding behind him, he has revived Terceira's canning industry, **turning locally caught fish into gourmet canned products.**

From shellfish diver to entrepreneur

Growing up in the Azores, Tibério learned to dive for shellfish with his cousins long before it became his livelihood. In his early twenties he obtained his professional shellfish licence - one of only 15 on the island - and began collecting limpets for the local market.

When the economic crisis pushed prices down, he looked outwards, **finding better returns by selling shellfish abroad.** Lobster followed, then fresh fish purchased from local fishers. But ensuring the quality of fresh fish over long distances proved far more difficult than ensuring the quality of shellfish.



Tibério Barbeito (on the right) and his colleague
© Tibério Barbeito

Finding a new way forward

A documentary on smoked Alaskan salmon sparked the idea. Tibério began **experimenting** with cold-smoking local fish species, testing batches on family and friends until the result was good enough to sell. The Azores had never had a **smoked fish product** before – now they did.

His next idea was to diversify into **canning**, but this required financial support he did not have. He approached **Grater, the Fisheries Local Action Group**, which helped him secure an **EU grant covering 75% of the cost of the equipment needed to set up his canning operation**. A second grant funded a professional marketing plan to ensure these new products met with success. *"All entrepreneurs should contact Grater and learn about all its measures and support, because they can make all the difference between growing or stagnating in their business"*, says Tibério.

His canned products, sold under the brand **Casa do Portinho**, use fresh fish landed by the local fleet - horse mackerel, Atlantic bonito with safflower, limpets and two species found in no other canned product in the world: ray and barracuda.

Overcoming the challenges of outermost regions

For businesses in places like the Azores, **the economics are unforgiving**. Equipment arrives slowly and at great cost. Local markets are small. Fresh products require fast, reliable logistics that island life rarely guarantees. Canning changed that equation entirely. *"It was the best decision I could have made,"* says Tibério. *"I safeguarded the continuity of the business"*. The **canning activities doubled the company's revenues** and allowed him to take on a second team member.

Casa do Portinho's artisanal products are also helping to **strengthen the island's identity**. The company focuses on **adding value to fish sustainably landed** by the local fleet, combining traditional methods with innovative ideas. *"At first, it was difficult"*, says Tibério, *"because I wanted the product to be perfect and unique – but I managed to achieve that, which is extremely rewarding"*.

For communities like Terceira, where geographic isolation drives up costs and limits local markets, **support from the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and from Fisheries Local Action Groups** can make the difference between a business that grows and one that does not. Today, *Casa do Portinho's* canned products sit on shelves in **France, Spain, Switzerland and the United States** – a long way from a single shellfish licence on a small Atlantic island.



Casa do Portinho products
© Tibério Barbeito

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