

## Alaska Herring Development Project

Six years ago, the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, with the help and support of UFA and the State of Alaska undertook the Alaska Herring Development Project with the goal of helping the Alaska Seafood Industry to create a sustainable market for Alaska Herring as a human food product.



Alaska Herring has always been primarily harvested for the Japanese Roe market and for bait used to catch other species such as Halibut and Crab and even reduced for oil. The need for herring oil was made obsolete 60 years ago and the Roe market has been in a steep decline for the last 15 years, to a point where it is nearing non-viability.

The Project has purchased several essential pieces of equipment that were non-existent in Alaska, or the USA for that matter until now. This equipment has been put to use developing and refining the processes needed to produce several Alaska Seafood products from springtime (spawning) Alaska herring.



Photos: Canned Alaska Herring



Fillets for the fresh market.

Alaska Canned Herring has now been sampled in local dishes and tested with consumers around the world from Africa (Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda) to Asia (Cambodia) and the Americas (Guatemala and the USA) with rave reviews. Our in-depth field research in Liberia and Guinea-Bissau has shown it to help malnourished and food insecure people of all ages, improving their nutrition profiles beyond anyone's greatest expectations. It is like no other product available in International Food Aid as it delivers concentrated, high quality marine protein and omega-3 fatty acids sorely lacking in the diets of food aid recipients. The Alaska Global Food Aid Program has moved this new Alaska Seafood product into the US Food Aid and Nutrition Programs, with new specifications placing it firmly on the USDA list of products available for Domestic and International Food Aid and Disaster Relief.

In 2015, a group of eight restaurants and two retail establishments in Seattle started a June promotion they called "Herring Week". These well-known restaurants served Alaska Herring in wonderful ways for lunch and dinner and showed the greater Seattle area what a great product it is. A whole new group of consumers are being introduced to Alaska Herring.



Photos: Left: Flatbread with Alaska Herring, goat cheese, beets and field greens Right: Herring sandwich with lettuce and tomato

In 2016, this event will expand to 50 or more restaurants and will again offer a creative assortment of menus featuring Alaska Herring Fillets that are produced here in Alaska. The Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute has partnered with several Alaska Seafood Industry members over the last 6 years to get to where we are today in this Research and Development project. Ocean Beauty Seafoods, Trident Seafoods, Icicle Seafoods, North Pacific Seafoods and Copper River Seafoods have all played a part to provide the raw materials, as well as marketing and processing support to get to where we are today.

Developing new products and then building a market for those products is a very long term, expensive and therefore risky undertaking. Even though the worldwide market for Herring products is very mature and large, Alaska's geographical positioning in relation to the "market" has us at an extreme disadvantage with the cost of freight and energy.

North Pacific Seafoods is one company that seems to have figured out a way to get beyond those challenges and has been processing Togiak (Bristol Bay) Herring this spring into fillets for a commercial market. The Herring Development Program was able to help this happen by loaning our unique machinery to their operation in Naknek, Alaska.



After producing a large amount of Wild Alaska Herring Fillets, NPSI will also supply the fillets for Herring Week 2016 and produce enough canned product for the Alaska Global Food Aid Program to share with interested members of the Worldwide Food Aid market.

What North Pacific Seafoods has done this spring is a first in Alaska and a great step forward toward bringing more value to this statewide failing fishery.

The State of Alaska had the vision to support this project and as R&D goes, positive progress has happened in a relatively short period of time. If the industry can add to these early accomplishments, fishermen and their communities, from Nome to Metlakatla will see the economic development that was envisioned at the very beginning of this project.