

# We can save the U.S. seafood industry

By Natalie Webster

There is an historical effort afoot to unite the U.S. seafood industry and improve its economic future. The National Seafood Marketing Coalition began writing legislation a year ago to develop a National Seafood Marketing Fund. The fund would provide the industry with sustained marketing dollars to promote all varieties of seafood harvested and produced in the United States. It would also increase consumer demand and help preserve U.S. fisheries by telling the story of traditional fishing families. The history and future of our industry is slowly eroding. We must connect consumers to the farmers of the sea and tell the story of the tremendous quality and variety of products they produce, while encouraging the next generation to follow in their footsteps.

The consumer wants to know where their food is coming from, whether it be country, community or process. American consumers receive insufficient information about the seafood they purchase and eat, leading to confusion in the market and uninformed buying decisions. Albacore in particular requires a constant marketing presence because of oversupply and competition around the world.

The National Seafood Marketing Coalition's effort is of historical proportion because of its success in uniting the U.S. seafood industry. Private labels (also

known as boutique labels) harvest and produce everything by hand. These are the mom-and-pop stores of days gone by. The coalition can help to fund these artisan products, creating niche markets that sell to high-end retailers or directly to consumers. In turn, creating green profits from products harvested and processed here in the United States — a perfect formula for creating new jobs in America.

A National Seafood Marketing Fund will increase consumer awareness, increase demand for U.S. seafood and ultimately preserve and actually increase American fishing and processing jobs.

The other huge factor in all of this is that our industry is aging. All U.S. fisheries are facing the attrition of generations of fishing families. The average age of the young albacore fisherman is 40. Once we lose the fisherman, how do we maintain American fisheries? Through information and education, consumers will understand that the pillagers, whom we are sometimes portrayed as, are in actuality those families who are painstakingly making every effort to produce healthy, environmentally safe, organic products that most seafood consumers are willing to pay extra for.

A true American success story lies within the American Tuna label. Started six years ago with six families and only a few employees, they did everything themselves, including putting the labels

on the cans. From this hard work, a boutique label was born, creating a demand that eventually gained notice by national retailers such as Whole Foods. Imagine this same story magnified across the industry? It *can* be done with a little funding. If consumers understand the stories behind the passion and success of our fisheries, they will want to support the U.S. seafood industry. They will ask, "Where's my food coming from? Is it a sustainable U.S. product?" This is what the coalition has the opportunity to do. Creating legislation that will provide sustainable funds to help the industry promote U.S. seafood will bring us together for one common cause, create jobs, grow our economy and put America's working waterfronts back to work again. This effort can be the answer to the challenges we face. The American Albacore Fishing Association fully encourages the establishment of a National Seafood Marketing Coalition and plans to be active in turning this legislation into law. **NF**

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