

## **Seafood Nutrition Partnership could become key driver of higher value for seafood**

SEAFOOD.COM NEWS by John Sackton - Oct 11, 2013

Three years ago if I told you that the U.S. seafood industry would raise \$5 million to prepare for a national campaign to change consumer value perceptions of seafood, it would not have seemed possible.

Yet that is what we have done, as reported by Linda Cornish, Executive Director for the Seafood Nutrition Partnership. The partnership is an independent 501 c 3 non-profit whose goal is to reduce health costs and improve public health outcomes through expanding the benefit of seafood in the diet.

Cornish gave a talk on the final day of the GOAL conference. Her program was the only speech during the entire meeting that laid the groundwork for American consumers to actually pay higher prices for seafood, rather than just respond to shortages and higher prices by cutting consumption.

This is counter-intuitive. In a macro sense, it seems hard to understand how US consumers will increase their consumption of seafood at the same time that it grows more expensive. But this is exactly what happens when the demand curve is shifted.

The argument goes like this. To increase aquaculture output, and to pay for the feeds and formulations necessary to have a fast growing and healthy product, seafood prices have to rise at the same time more quantities are produced. This is what will attract the investment and technology necessary to keep expanding the global supply of seafood. One way this can happen is if consumers change their perception of the value of seafood by making it a more important part of their diet.

There has been increased attention to diet as a growing public health problem in the U.S. By 2010 2 out of every 3 adults in the U.S. were either overweight or obese. The biggest causes are poor diet and lack of exercise.

This has led to a range of dietary recommendations that are having an impact. One is to eat less red meat, another is to avoid trans-fats, a third is eat less fat and sugar, and a fourth is to reduce portion size and calorie intake.

For seafood, the dietary recommendation is to eat fish and seafood twice a week. This is not only recommended by the US government, but also by many global health organizations such as the World Health Organization, the American Heart Association, FAO, and the National Institute of Health among others.

Yet these recommendations on seafood have not resulted in changed behavior.

Today, only 1 in 5 US adults eats seafood twice a week. This actually is a well-documented public health crisis, but no one is communicating it in that way.

The Seafood Nutrition Partnership aims to change that with a \$15 million campaign to educate Doctors and the public about the public health and policy importance of increasing the amount of seafood in the American diet.

The organization was formed under the guidance of the National Fisheries Institute, but is now completely independent. Over the past two years, the seafood industry has pledged \$5 million to this

campaign.

Cornish says their goal is to raise \$15 million, half from the seafood industry, and half from other foundations and organizations committed to public health. At this time, the goal is to demonstrate that other public health foundations will support this by raising \$2.5 million in additional funds, at which point the program will have enough funds to begin.

Why should this happen? The public health research shows that of all deaths that are preventable due to better diet and avoiding tobacco use, poor seafood eating habits are the 4th biggest factor accounting statistically for 84,000 deaths per year.

Tobacco is the biggest killer, leading to 467,000 preventable deaths annually. This is followed by lack of exercise, with 191,000, high salt intake at 102,000, and low seafood consumption at 84,000, followed by low fruit and vegetable intake, at 58,000.

The reason is that heart disease, cancer, respiratory disease, and stroke are the four leading causes of preventable deaths. Of the top five causes of preventable death listed by the CDC, heart disease and stroke accounts for 46%.

Yet accepted scientific research now shows that eating 8 ounces of seafood a week can reduce the risk of dying from heart attack or stroke by 36%.

By reducing heart attack and stroke, preventable deaths are minimized. If the entire US population did eat 8 ounces of seafood every week, there would be approximately 84,000 fewer deaths from heart attack and stroke.

Furthermore, the costs of treating heart disease are staggering and are projected to grow from \$273 billion today to \$818 billion by 2030. This cost can be substantially reduced through changes in diet.

The same pattern exists on a global scale where 22% of heart attacks are related to lower than needed seafood consumption.

There are other documented health benefits from seafood as well. Mothers who eat 8 to 12 ounces of seafood per week have a better outcome for their babies, with an average increase of 6 points in IQ, and better brain and eye health.

Older Americans who had the highest blood levels of fatty acids gained from eating fish lived on average 2.2 years longer than their peers.

All of this is due to the fact that the body needs DHA and other essential fatty acids that come from seafood. These are absorbed at 20 times the rate as plant based fatty acids. The human body can synthesize some of its own DHA from some plants, but the absorption rate is 1/20 that of seafood with omega-3's.

Most Americans get their health advice from doctors. As a routine part of screening, adults are asked about their use of alcohol and tobacco, and given specific advice.

The goal of the Seafood Nutrition Partnership is to bring the seafood health message to doctors and the public, so a third part of any screening during an annual checkup would be how much seafood do you eat. If it is too little, your doctor will recommend you use more.

Huge amounts of money are being spent to change behavior on tobacco, red meat consumption, exercise, and less salt intake. Virtually none is spent on modifying seafood consumption behavior, yet lack of seafood is one of the single most identifiable risk factors for heart attack and stroke.

This presents a tremendous win-win opportunity to reduce health costs, provide Americans with better health outcomes - less preventable deaths - and healthier babies, and at the same time change the value of seafood in the mind of the consumer.

According to Linda Cornish, the partnership is now focused on taking this message to funders outside of the seafood industry who support public health goals of better outcomes and lower costs. Once an additional \$2.5 million is pledged, the actual campaign can begin.

This presentation was one of the most optimistic at the entire conference, as it shows a path by which aquaculture production, feed development, and higher prices all can be achieved together in a mutually dependent way.