



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

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The Pacific coast pilchard fishery - America's largest fishing industry - entered its 1943-44 season today with war-created demands for its products heavier than ever before but with a "better than ever" chance of achieving its production goals, despite manpower difficulties and reductions in its fleet, Coordinator of Fisheries Harold L. Ickes declared today.

More than a billion pounds of pilchards are needed this year to meet the minimum demands of the war program for canned sardines, animal feeding meals, vitamin oils, and fish oils for essential industrial uses. Sixty percent of the sardines will be bought by the Government for Lend-lease and military consumption; the remaining 40 percent goes to U.S. civilians. Sardine meal is a high-protein feeding supplement valued by growers of hogs and poultry, while the oil is a valuable source of Vitamin D, yields glycerine for explosives, and has many important uses in industry.

Last year the catch fell off 20 percent from the level of the previous season because of wartime hindrances to fishing. The sardine fishery was hard hit by loss of boats to the Navy (a first class sardine seiner catches about 6 or 7 million pounds), manpower shortages among fishermen and skilled cannery labor, and security restrictions on fishing operations.

A few seiners, no longer urgently needed by the Navy, were returned to active sardine fishing near the close of the past season. Return of every additional boat that can be spared by the military services this fall, the season when the largest catches are made, would greatly improve the prospects of the fishery, Coordinator Ickes said.

The problem of night fishing, which gave trouble during the early months of the war, has now been solved. Sardine fishermen work largely at night because they can locate the schools of fish by watching for the phosphorescent glow made by a school swimming near the surface. The darkest nights are best for sardine fishing because moonlight dims the phosphorescent "firing." Now the sardine boats assemble about sundown inside the harbor, from which they are escorted, convoy fashion, by the Coast Guard. The boats reenter the harbor the following morning under similar escort.

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This season the pilchard fishery, although governed by the general provisions of State law, is operating under a coordinated production plan developed after weeks of consultation between industry leaders, the California Division of Fish and Game, and representatives of the Coordinator's Office, and designed to insure a steady flow of fish to canneries and reduction plants. As arrangements were completed last week for the operation of the new plan, representatives of the industry expressed satisfaction with the program and confidence in its success.

During the present season all pilchard boats will fish under permits issued by the Coordinator or his local representatives. Deliveries will be directed by port dispatchers who will see that the fish go to the plants that are ready to process them. Under the ordinary system, boats are bound by contract to deliver to certain shore plants, with the result that some may stand idle at times while nearby plants are glutted with fish.

Also to be determined by the Coordinator's Office is the division of the catch between the canners and the reduction plants where the meal and oil is processed. Demands for canned sardines and for the byproducts of the fishery are both far in excess of the possible supply, but it is expected that approximately a quarter of the catch will be canned, while the remainder will go as far as possible toward making up the current deficit in the supply of fish oils and feeding meals.

Fishing for pilchards begins according to State law on August 1 at San Francisco and Monterey, but is delayed until October 1 at the southern ports of San Pedro and San Diego. The season in California, where 95 percent of the catch is made, extends through March, with the heaviest catches in the fall and early winter months. A small pilchard fishery in Washington and Oregon is active from July to September.

The pilchard fishery, of insignificant size prior to 1917, became a major fishery during the first World War because of the need of its products. Its present yield is nearly ten times as great as that of the 1917-19 period, but current needs are far in excess of the tonnage the fishery produced last year.

Pilchards are small silvery fish of the herring family, taken in commercial quantities only within 40 or 50 miles of the shore. They are found all the way from Mexico to Southeastern Alaska, but the center of abundance is off California. Related species are found in many other parts of the world. The Japanese catch of sardines reaches the enormous total of more than two and one-half billion pounds.