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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release OCTOBER 14, 1956

FWS RESEARCH HELPS BRING FRESH FISH SUPPLY CLOSER TO CONSUMER'S TABLE

Through research the Fish and Wildlife Service is pointing up new market goals for the fishing industry, and through technology it is showing ways to move more efficiently ocean-fresh fish to the consumer's table.

Among the possible marketing goals which Service efforts are bringing into focus for the fishing industry Arnie J. Suomela, Associate Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service lists such things as--

182,000 eating places which do not now serve fish or shellfish;

"Inland U.S.A." where the per capita fish consumption is well below the sea-board average;

The more than 10,000 frozen food locker plants in the country, many of which do not have fish among the products available for locker customers;

A large but yet indefinite field of in-plant eating places (such as cafeterias in big assembly plants) which is now being studied;

The field of public institutions which is now being studied to determine which ones offer good markets for fish, and the school lunch program which the Fish and Wildlife Service has aided for years to the mutual betterment of the school child and the industry;

And the largest field of all, the millions of American housewives who daily plan the meals for the family--a field rich in possibilities for greater sales of fish and fish products and a field which is now being given serious and scientific study by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

In technological studies the Fish and Wildlife Service has gone far in showing the industry how fish can be delivered virtually only "hours old" to the customer. These studies are practically following the fish from the water to the table--on shipboard, in ship storage, in transit, in land storage and right up to sales display.

The initial step in getting high quality fish or fish products to the customer begins the minute the fish are taken out of the water, Fish and Wildlife Service technicians say.

Important questions which have been studied include freezing methods, ability of various species of fish to retain flavor and freshness during periods of refrigeration, the effect of breaching upon freezing, the use of protective coverings to insure freshness in frozen fish, the development of "quality standards" and the search now in progress for the "flavor component," that intangible thing which makes fish taste like fish instead of something else.

Success in these programs, figuratively, brings the consumer--regardless of where he is--closer to the water's edge and make it possible to supply him with a product which meets the test of comparison with a fish just taken from its native waters.

One phase of the broad research program is to determine how the merchandising methods of the Nation's 413,000 retail fish products markets measure up to the consumer preference, and there are many facets of both merchandising and preference.

One approach which the Service has taken relates to packaging and portions. If the study of fish portions served in restaurants and other public eating places leads to packaging fresh or frozen fish on an acceptable portion basis, those of the 182,000 restaurants which have deferred serving fish because of handling difficulties might well become a steady market for portion-packaged fillets and other fish product.

To get the data on household consumers food tastes and buying habits, housewives are being interviewed to determine the factors influencing the use or nonuse of the various species and kinds of canned fish and shellfish.

Studies are also being made of the size of package the housewife wants, her preference on species and the availability of that species at the time she wants it.

Surveys on easy-to-prepare fish products such as breaded fish sticks or breaded shrimp have shown that the young housewife is more readily attracted to that type of a commodity; that the city dweller is a better customer than his rural cousin; that there is a relationship between the sales of these items and the salary brackets of the citizens, with low salary families buying them lightly; and furthermore the surveys show that the majority of folks who use these products once become steady customers afterward.

But experience has shown that the customer insists upon uniformly good quality and that if the supply does not meet this particular preference sales are not made. To help the industry meet this quality demand by customers and to help the customers get the product they desire, the Fish and Wildlife Service, through technological studies, has been a leading force in the establishment of "quality standards."

The most recent step in that direction is the establishment of a program for the development of voluntary Federal standards for grades. Although the first

standards, those for fish sticks, have been available for use only since August 21, 1956, several fish products companies have adopted these voluntary Federal standards in reply to the consumers refusal to purchase products below satisfactory quality levels.

Next in the order of expected issuance will be standards for fish blocks, which are the raw material from which fish sticks are made, such portion control type products as breaded fish squares, for breaded shrimp, and frozen fillets of cod, haddock, and ocean perch. These standards will serve as yardsticks for the evaluation of quality for those products offered to the consumer.

In other words the Fish and Wildlife Service is studying or had studied most of the important steps between the fishermen's net and the consumer's table. It is blazing out a trail, so to speak, by setting up techniques whereby the industry can deliver to the consumer the freshest and most flavorful fish product. It is helping the consumer get the product he wants by finding out what he wants and passing that information along to the industry. Finally, it is determining guidelines of quality through which the industry and the consumer share a common confidence.

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