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Never a dulse moment in this chef's kitchen

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Jason Ball has an unusual job at an unusual place. He's the research chef at the Food Innovation Center in Portland, which itself is a joint venture of Oregon State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and the state Department of Agriculture.

The FIC was among the first in the U.S. Ball believes his position is still somewhat unusual, but may become more common over time.

Ball's job is to help develop food products. He said being a research chef combines the technical skills of culinary arts with the principles and methodologies of food science.

Which leads us to dulse, which is basically a red seaweed. Yum.

But it's nutritious. OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport figured out 15 years ago how to raise dulse in tanks rather than harvest it from the ocean. The Marine Science Center was raising it to feed abalone when an OSU business professor, Chuck Toombs, took notice and turned his marketing students loose on the project. OSU fisheries researcher Chris Langdon and colleagues patented a strain of dulse, and Ball was hired to figure out what to make with it.

His hiring had its own bit of dulse kismet. Ball was in Copenhagen, working on plant-based ice cream products for the Nordic Food Lab, when he saw the job notice from the Food Innovation Center.

He was snacking on a dulse ice cream sandwich as he emailed then-center Director Michael Morrisey and FIC Product Development Manager Sarah Masoni to ask about the position.

He made sure to men-



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Jason Ball is the research chef at Oregon State University's Food Innovation Center in Portland.

tion his snack choice; he got the job and started about 14 months ago.

The first commercial product to come from Ball's FIC work is a dulse seaweed salad dressing and marinade, sold at New Seasons stores in the Portland area.

Ball enjoys the challenge of developing products that are "less luxurious or appealing." It's easy to make lobster or steak taste good, he said, but seaweed?

"I like to say that I am an equal opportunity cook — I don't discriminate against ingredients," Ball said by email. "Why can't we approach all ingredients with that excitement and enthusiasm?"

Jason Ball

Who: Research chef at the Food Innovation Center in Portland, a joint venture of Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Personal: Age 31, originally from Chicago. Worked as a chef there, in New York and outside London. Began work at FIC in January 2015. Lives in Portland.

Best known for so far: Dulse development work. Developing food that can be made from seaweed, which in turn is grown in tanks, not harvested from the ocean.

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