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Seafood: Processing jobs are on the increase

Continued from Page 1

seafood processors.

Commercial fishers landed 227 million pounds of fish and shellfish in Oregon in 2016, about 56 pounds per Oregonian.

The haul had a dockside value of \$149 million, a gain of 29 percent over 2015.

Fishermen sold a small portion of the harvest off their vessels or at markets directly to consumers. Most was sold to processors and buyers, then exported or sold to wholesalers, retailers, restaurants and consumers.

In 2016, Oregon exported \$33.3 million worth of fish, crustaceans and related prepared products in 2016, ac-

ording to the Census Bureau.

Canada was by far the leading foreign destination, taking 56 percent of all exports. Japan was the No. 2 destination, taking 11 percent of exports.

Canada took a lot of Dungeness crab, Albacore tuna, and trout or salmon fillets. Japan took mostly unidentified frozen fillets and crab. About 45 percent of seafood exports are whole or live fish, presumably with further processing done in the destination country.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

The seafood processing industry fared relatively well during the Great Recession. Employment dipped significantly in 2009, but otherwise mostly grew through 2013.

Employment in 2013 was about 150 more than in 2001. This may not sound like much of an accomplishment, but Oregon lost 40,000 jobs from all manufacturing businesses during the same period.

From 2013 to 2015, fishing employment fell by about 125 jobs, but the industry gained 28 jobs in 2016, and appears to have grown in 2017. This could be a new trend of an increasing number of processors and employees.

This may be due to the entrance of a few specialty processors who serve niche markets.

Employment in seafood processing tends to be seasonal. It peaks in midsummer and hits its low point in March. Much of the industry's employment depends directly on when fish are landed.

This, in turn, depends on weather, ocean conditions, fish life-cycles, and regulations, especially those established by the Pacific Fishery Management Council. It has the authority to open and close Oregon fisheries; commercial crab season, for example, opened more than a month late this winter.

The summer employment peak coincides not only with better fishing weather, but increased availability of fish.

Tuna, salmon and especially Pacific whiting, are available in the summer. Pacific whiting, or hake, is Oregon's largest fishery by volume. A little more than 113 million pounds were landed in 2016. (Because it was plentiful, however, it fetched only eight cents per pound when landed.)

Whiting is used to make surimi, which is used to make imitation crab or lobster. Manufacturing surimi requires a good deal of very controlled processing and rapid cleaning and handling of the fish. This means that surimi processors must hire many seasonal employees.



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2

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3

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