



Gigi Egan explains her wares while selling salmon at the Vancouver Farmer's Market.

There's money in public sales, but lots of work too

Tired of getting small change from the big buyers when you know your catch is worth a lot more?

Even with limited openings, salmon gillnetters in British Columbia were lucky to get \$1.75 a pound for sockeye and 70 cents a pound for chum salmon in 2009.

Delivering to a major buyer, an albacore troller can expect to be paid in the neighborhood of \$1 a pound for frozen tuna.

But take that same fish to a public sale dock in Steveston or False Creek, or to one of the farmers markets that have sprung up in the heart of Vancouver, and you can get \$15 a pound for sockeye and \$12 a pound for albacore tuna products.

So what's the trick?

Gigi Egan has been selling salmon, albacore, and shrimp from her family's vessel the *Iron Maiden* for years.

"There seems to be a new breed of direct marketers out there," Egan said. "There are many more avenues for food producers, as well as fishers, to market direct to the public."

Back to basics: Egan cites the huge movement she says is occurring globally: Consumers want to get back to basics and want to purchase from the producer.


"There is a huge demand to connect that way. Not only do they have a sense of where their food is coming from, they have a good feeling purchasing from local producers.

"As a small fisher, it is not a good gig to sell to the big companies. It won't always keep us in the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed," Egan said. "It doesn't pay for the overhead.

"If you are ambitious and have some business savvy, this is your opportunity to market direct so you are in contact with the end user and your profits should be realized."

Egan says she is frustrated seeing fishers selling product direct

continued on page 14

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to the public for considerably less than its value because they don't have good marketing skills.

"They don't realize the quality of their own product or the value of the relationship with the consumer," she said. "I'd like to see fishermen get access to some opportunity to get some business and marketing skills."

Here are a few problems fishermen face:

- They don't consider all their costs to get their product to the consumer.
- They don't charge what it is worth.

Egan says it is essential to cover your costs and make money.

"You gotta get paid for what you do," she said. "It is very expensive to be fishers and small food producers."

"I think if they are sharp and paying attention to prices and details and, depending on how many fisheries, you can make a very substantial comfortable living," Egan said. "You are no longer the poor fisherman."

If you do it right, it can pay off, she said, explaining that she has gone beyond selling in markets. Now she takes orders.

Substantial living: "I have set up a network of a delivery system and a customer list. It was a whole lot of effort, but you make a pretty substantial living. You can buy yourself a new truck and not worry about it."

In order to sell to the public, there are various requirements in British Columbia.

The fish must be processed at a federally inspected plant or cannery. Home-prepared products are not acceptable. A vendor's license from the provincial Ministry of Agriculture and Fish is required.

To sell to the Vancouver Farmers Market, vendors first of all must be the producer or a family member of the producer, according to Roberta LaQuaglia, operations manager for the market.

"It is a producer-only scenario," LaQuaglia said. "It has to be the ones catching the fish or a close family member like their spouse or father, for example. They need to submit



Donna Berger sells frozen salmon caught by her husband, Tony, and son Sasha at the Vancouver Farmer's market.

their appropriate licenses, their provincial vendor license, and federal fishing license."

LaQuaglia says that vendors must meet local health authority requirements for keeping fish at a market.

"Right now it is frozen fish only, and vendors must have coolers or an actual freezer," she said. "Other than that, they have to follow some basic guidelines of behavior and participation in the market."

Providing information about how and where the fish is caught is helpful as well, LaQuaglia added.

The label: The health department asks where the food is processed and asks to see the label, which must tell consumers to keep the product refrigerated or frozen. The label also must have a producer's number, a tracing number, and the date the product

was packed.

Down at the False Creek public sales dock in downtown Vancouver, albacore troller Gray McPhedran sells seven prepared tuna products and round fish.

In addition to whole round frozen albacore, McPhedran sells regular canned no-additives, canned no salt, canned hot smoked, skinless boneless loins, cold smoked vacuum packed, maple syrup candied tuna vacuum packed, and jerky vacuum packed.

At False Creek, fishermen are permitted to sell portions and prepared products. In Steveston, the rules are different and fishermen are not permitted to sell portions of fish.

McPhedran says he has to sell to the public to make any money, despite the expense of paying for processing and canning.

"We get the same price for albacore tuna from the buyers as we got 30 years ago. A buck a pound. Not much more," he said. "I pretty much had to. I could sell some to companies, but at a buck a pound it is tough sledding."

The loins are \$12 a pound.

"It sounds like a lot of money, but the loining is \$7.50 a pound when you provide the fish. But for every pound of fish you get .45 pounds of fish. There are costs for vacuum packing, labeling, on and on."

McPhedran sells individual 6.3-ounce cans for \$5 and a case of 24 cans for \$100. Canned smoked tuna is \$150 a case.

Canning is done by St. Jean's Cannery & Smokehouse in Nanaimo. ♪



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