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Community

Port Clyde processing plant opens

By Shlomit Auciello
The Herald Gazette Reporter

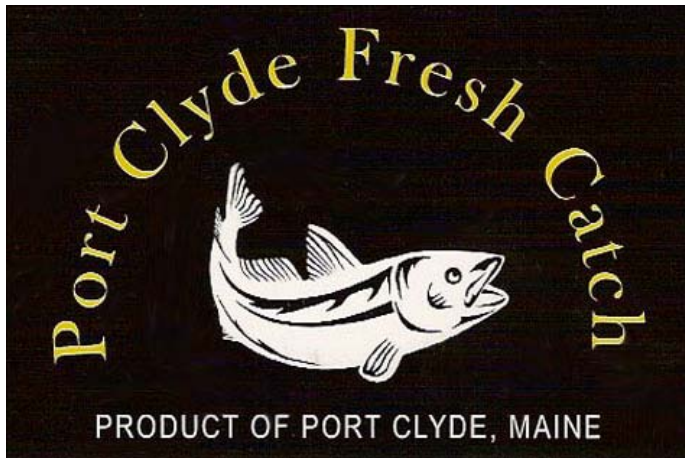
PORT CLYDE (March 16): Laura Kramar, marketing cooperative coordinator for the Midcoast Fishermen's Association, announced Monday that the final hurdle that was facing the association's Port Clyde Fresh Catch processing facility has been passed.

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Kramar said a Maine Department of Agriculture inspector phoned her Monday at 9:30 a.m. as she was returning from the International Boston Seafood Show 2009, where she and MFA Chairman Glen Libby presented a session called "From Port to Point of Sale," detailing the value of alliances between marketing cooperatives such as the MFA's and retail outlets such as supermarkets and restaurants.



The Midcoast Fishermen's Association markets shrimp and other seafood using the Port Clyde Fresh Catch brand. (Image courtesy of Midcoast Fishermen's Association)

Libby, who had driven back late Sunday night, met the inspector at the facility on Factory Road, where final approval was given for the plant to begin converting shrimp off the boat into shrimp that is easier for customers to use.

"What was needed was the ability to transform the product into a form that the customer wanted," Kramar said.

Fishermen have been sidelined recently due to low market prices and the closure of wholesale processing plants, but Monday's news meant that many planned to take their boats out on Tuesday.



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Port Clyde Fresh Catch, the marketing arm of the Midcoast Fishermen's Association, leases a part of this building on Factory Road for its processing facility. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

"We're going to get going as quickly as possible," said Libby, who was in the process of ordering packaging for the finished product that he hopes will be ready for distribution by the end of the week.

"We're trying to very methodically figure out how to test this out and incrementally grow these markets," Kramar said.



Randy Cushman prepares the cookers for shrimp that will begin arriving at the Port Clyde Fresh Catch plant this week. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

The MFA has put in an extensive ultraviolet system to be sure that the water used in processing is the cleanest available. Staff members have taken training to ensure the food remains safe as it travels between parts of the plant, and temperature controls are very stringent throughout the facility, Libby said.

He said some roadside sellers of seafood are not as strict as the MFA plant will be in following the health guidelines for storing and packaging its product.

Libby said he will contact the co-op's community supported fishery customers, many of whom did not order shrimp this winter, to see if they are interested in buying the product now that it will be sold without heads. Shrimp will also be available totally picked out as well as cooked, Kramar said.

Randy Cushman said March 10 that much of the work to get the facility operational was done by volunteer members of the cooperative and their families. Material was donated, and Cushman said those who assisted in the effort included Donny Paulsen, Buddy Beal, Travis Sawyer, Steve and Raymond Benner, Glen and Cindy Hall, and others.

Cushman said the MFA's intention was not to replace Cozy Harbor Seafood and other processors. "We just want to try different markets than what they have," he said.

Both Libby and Kramar said they hope to sell a large volume of shrimp to community supported fishery customers, restaurants and retail outlets between now and May 29, when

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