Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

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BARING ALASKA'S SOLE:

ALASKA FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION RELEASES FLATFISH VIDEO

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA - Alaskan fishermen are pursuing a new fishery based on the 425,000 metric-ton Alaska flatfish resource. Now anyone interested in the new Alaska flatfish fishery can see it for themselves.

Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) has released a 20-minute video about harvesting, handling, processing and quality of Alaskan flatfish. The video, entitled "The Sole Source," was produced for AFDF by Nine Star Productions of Anchorage, and features the Eagle Fisheries plant in Kodiak, Alaska, where 5 million lbs. of flatfish were processed last year. The video is available from AFDF for $20.

The video is the first to be made about the Alaskan flatfish fishery. It outlines on-board handling, processing requirements, laboratory analysis, and quality measures for the four major flatfish species in the Gulf of Alaska: rock sole, rex sole, Dover sole and flathead sole. The video is part of AFDF's Gulf of Alaska flatfish industry development project, a two-year effort to develop a commercial fishery from Alaska's largest untapped fisheries resources.

"Sole and flounder have long been staples of the East Coast fishing industry, but it's only recently that Alaskan companies have begun competing," said Mel Monsen, executive director of AFDF. "Demand for sole and flounder has increased nationwide, and the East Coast stocks have dwindled. It's a perfect opportunity for Alaskan fishermen and processors."

Alaska's waters are home to 1 million harvestable metric tons of flatfish, most of which have gone unharvested in the past. Last year, fishermen harvested 385,000 metric tons of flounders and soles in the Bering Sea, 66% of it in joint

venture operations for yellowfin sole. The Gulf of Alaska allowable flatfish catch is 23,000 metric tons; last year only 15,000 metric tons were harvested. There are ten major species of flatfish in Alaskan waters.

"For this project, we borrowed existing flatfish handling and processing technology from different countries around the world and modified it to apply to Alaskan flatfish," said Peter Moore, flatfish project manager at AFDF. "Next year, the second phase of our program will focus on developing commercial uses for the still-unused species of flatfish, and on designing new processing equipment to increase recoveries and improve product quality."

The video focuses on quality studies conducted by AFDF and by Dr. Diana Greene at the National Marine Fisheries Service Utilization Lab in Kodiak. Those studies revealed that Alaskan flatfish producers can produce fresher, higher-quality flatfish than East Coast producers because Alaskan processing plants are closer to the fishing grounds, and the flatfish can be filleted and frozen at the peak of flavor.

"We now know that Alaskan flatfish producers have a quality advantage over East Coast producers of flatfish," Monsen said. "We also have the advantage of a huge, healthy resource."

AFDF's flatfish industry development project is part of the foundation's program to provide information and technological assistance to Alaskan fishermen and processors interested in developing new or under-used fisheries. AFDF is an industry-supported non-profit organization created in 1978 by Alaskan fishermen and processors to conduct research and development projects that would enhance local development of Alaska's fisheries. The foundation is supported by seafood and food industry members, and by the Saltonstall-Kennedy fisheries development program, which is administered through the National Marine Fisheries Service.