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Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

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ALASKA FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION AWARDED GRANT TO MAKE ARROWTOOTH FLOUNDER MORE PALATABLE

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA -- Arrowtooth flounder may be one of the most plentiful fish in the sea, but it's just not very good eating, Mel Monsen says. That's why the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation is launching a project to improve the texture of arrowtooth flounder and make it a commercially profitable fishery.

The foundation was awarded a $50,000 grant from the state-sponsored Alaska Science and Technology Foundation to fund the project.

Monsen, executive director of the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, said the arrowtooth flounder study is important because if an arrowtooth fishery were profitable, Alaskan fishermen could expand their fishing opportunities and bring more profits into the state.

"It's believed that there are about 1.2 million metric tons of arrowtooth flounder in the Gulf of Alaska, and possibly a half million metric tons in the Bering Sea," Monsen said. "These stocks represent a tremendous opportunity for Alaskan fishermen. But right now arrowtooth are not profitable. Instead, they cost fishermen time and money because they are usually thrown back."

Monsen said the problem with arrowtooth is that the flesh contains a certain muscle protease that causes the flesh to get soft when it is cooked. While cooked arrowtooth doesn't present any health problems, its soft texture is unpalatable to consumers. That's why almost no one eats arrowtooth, Monsen said.

"Our project has two parts," he said. "First, we will try to identify and characterize the protease that causes this effect in the fish muscle. Then we

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will experiment with adding protease inhibitor to the flesh to see if we can make it retain firmness after cooking."

The second part of the project includes producing surimi from arrowtooth, and comparing its characteristics with traditional surimi, which is usually made of Alaska pollock.

Dr. Diana Greene from the National Marine Fisheries Service lab in Kodiak will conduct the scientific work to characterize the protease and identify an inhibitor. Dr. Greene has initiated groundbreaking work in this area, and her further studies are considered key to the arrowtooth project.

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation was awarded the grant in late August; work will begin in January, when Gulf flounder fishing begins again. The arrowtooth flounder project is one segment of an ongoing flatfish development project that the fisheries foundation has conducted for the past two years.

"It's appropriate that our project was included in the first year's grants from the new Science and Technology Foundation," Monsen said. "The majority of the flounder and sole in the Gulf of Alaska are harvested by Alaskan fishermen, and Alaskans have the most to gain from a fully developed flounder fishery."

With Gulf pollock stocks declining and gear conflicts restricting other fisheries, Alaskan fishermen and processors are casting about for alternative fisheries. Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation hopes to provide fishermen and processors with the information and technical support they need to develop new opportunities.

Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation is a non-profit industry organization created in 1978 by Alaskan harvesters and processors to conduct development projects for the fisheries. The foundation is supported by seafood producers and users, and by the Saltonstall-Kennedy fisheries development program, which is administered through National Marine Fisheries Service.