



Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

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SURIMI RESEARCH PAYS OFF IN NEW PRODUCTS

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA -- Some big food companies predicted five years ago that surimi would be the hottest new food ingredient since red pepper hit a catfish. In the years since Alaskan fish processors started making it, surimi has found its way into imitation crab, shrimp and smoked salmon, into granola bars and protein drinks, and into breaded meat nuggets and surimi-sausage pizza toppers.

Now Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) hopes to launch surimi into a new career.

First, AFDF will investigate custom blends of surimi for use in products besides seafood analogs. The Foundation hopes to interest companies who might use surimi as a protein ingredient if it came in a different form than the traditional frozen blocks.

"The uniqueness of surimi can be a problem as well as a virtue," said AFDF's surimi project manager Loretta Lure. "It's usually produced according to one certain formula, and is provided only in frozen block form. But most food companies use dried ingredients, and their formulations may not call for the stabilizers and other ingredients that are added to surimi."

Lure said the Foundation will survey potential users of surimi, and contract for production of custom-made samples that fit a wider array of specifications. "We're trying to diversify the markets for surimi beyond seafood analogs," she said. "Surimi is a known entity now. Food companies know what it is, and they're eager to work with it. But right now it's too hard to work with, or isn't available in a variety of forms."

Samples of custom-blended surimi will be sent to food companies interested in trying out surimi as an ingredient. Information about the market survey and about the sample products will be published for the seafood industry.

The second AFDF surimi project will help create a whole new surimi-based product and test market it in the U.S.

"A lot of food companies are intrigued with surimi," Lure said. "But they envision its use in imitation products. And they still think it's a foreign ingredient, made with Japanese technology. They want to see a surimi-based product that's not an imitation, but a stand-alone food item created for the U.S. market."

The Foundation sponsored a similar project a few years ago, helping to develop products made from surimi/meat combinations. As a result of that project, the USDA granted approval for the use of surimi in blended meats. Several surimi/meat products now are on the commercial market.

"Our goal is to make all the research that's been going on about surimi directly beneficial to the Alaskan surimi producer," Lure said. "We want to identify the opportunities that have gone unnoticed in the marketplace, and take down the barriers to those opportunities. Surimi has a tremendous potential in the food industry."

The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation is a private, non-profit organization that first helped develop surimi production technology in Alaska. The Foundation's surimi industry development project sponsored the first commercial surimi production five years ago. Since then, the Foundation has conducted numerous fisheries development projects, including surimi research, a flatfish fishery development project, and an effort to make seafood processing wastes profitable for fish processors. The Foundation is supported by fishermen and processors and by funds from the Saltonstall-Kennedy industry grants program of National Marine Fisheries Service.