



Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation, Inc.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SCHOOL CHILDREN TO TASTE TEST ALASKA SALMON NUGGETS

Anchorage, Alaska - Can Alaska salmon nuggets compare to pizza and chicken on the school lunch menu? The Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation recently got the go-ahead from the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute to taste test salmon nuggets in school lunch programs. "Salmon nuggets are made from frozen blocks of skinless, boneless, minced pink salmon," said AFDF director Chris Mitchell. "When breaded and oven-baked the nuggets are a tasty finger food. We think school kids will like them," he said. The test will be funded by the 1% assessment paid to ASMI by salmon fishermen for domestic marketing.

The project, if successful will demonstrate to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and school districts themselves that the Alaska salmon nuggets are a good tasting and reasonably priced new product for school lunch programs across the nation.

USDA supplies 20% of the food to the school lunch program. School districts buy the remainder of their food directly. The goal of the test is to encourage schools to buy the nuggets

commercially and at the same time convince USDA to offer the nuggets on their product list. Right now, schools across the country serve fish on the average only once a month, if at all. The federal department currently provides canned salmon to schools and other public programs, but many of the schools commented that a salmon "finger food" might be more acceptable.

"The potential to reach thousands of school children of all ages could give the industry a significant new outlet for pink salmon," explained Mitchell. "Most of these children have no idea how good Alaska salmon tastes. By reaching school children we would not only be providing a new market for pink salmon now but we would be cultivating the tastes of tomorrow's buyers too."

In order to garner the interest of the USDA in Alaska salmon nuggets as a viable product for purchase for the school lunch program, the Foundation held a taste test in Washington D.C. earlier this year. A panel of testers including officials from USDA and Food and Nutrition Services found that the nuggets met their standards. The panel concluded that the true test however was to put "the nuggets where the mouths are" and see how school children respond.

AFDF will carry out the tests this spring in three school districts in California and Washington. After the nuggets receive approval of the area nutritionist, students from grades 1-12 will taste test the nuggets. "Focus" groups from each age level will

give their opinion of the product. If the responses are favorable, salmon nuggets will be placed on the school district's lunch menu for a day. During that lunch, trays will be collected to measure "plate waste" by weighing how much of the nuggets the school kids throw away.

Three companies now commercially produce nuggets from Alaska pink salmon and several others have the capability. The nuggets come from frozen salmon blocks, which during the 1993 season were produced by six companies across Alaska.

Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation is a private, non-profit organization run by fishermen, processors and food industry representatives, and has conducted a variety of fisheries development projects in the North Pacific since 1979.