

Fishery peddles guilt-free seafood

Portsmouth firm sees eco-friendly as market smart

By Clare Kittredge

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PORTSMOUTH, N.H.— Henry Lovejoy's motto is "you can have your seafood and eat it, too — you just have to know where it comes from."

Lovejoy runs a fast-growing Portsmouth company that peddles fish caught in an environmentally friendly way.

Called EcoFish, the three-year-old firm capitalizes on an exploding market for seafood caught in sustainable fisheries. In other words, EcoFish peddles the fishy version of health food.

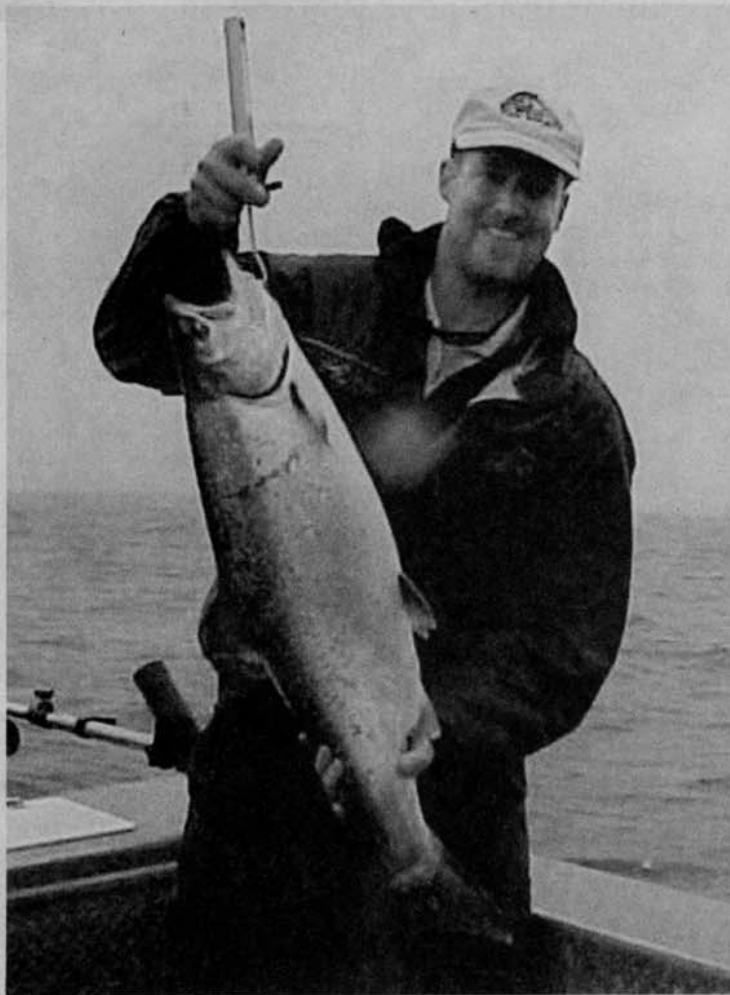
Over the last six months, EcoFish has doubled its growth from \$1 to \$2 million in annual sales, said CEO Lovejoy, adding that his company is unique in the country. "And we expect at least the same amount of growth in the next six months. We've just started."

With fish supplies dwindling due to overfishing, fishermen struggling to make a living, and conservationists concerned that some species are becoming extinct, Lovejoy says the answer is getting consumers interested in sustainable fishing practices and the fish they produce.

By "sustainable," he means seafood caught or raised in ways that don't wipe out fish stocks or harm the oceans, he explained.

The movement took off when marine conservationists started educating the public about "dolphin-safe" tuna and other fish that were in trouble like Chilean sea bass and swordfish.

"The problem with the tuna



Henry Lovejoy is banking on consumer demand for his fish that are caught in an environmentally-friendly way.

fishery was they were catching tuna in purse seine nets," he said, referring to nets that trapped tuna like a purse. "The boats would circle tuna with nets and scoop them out. The problem was the dolphins were feeding at the same time as the tuna, and they would pull up dead dolphins."

Lovejoy acknowledges that fish bearing the EcoFish label costs about 10 to 20 percent more than

fish sold in regular fish markets, retailing \$4.99 to \$7.99 per six-ounce portion.

But he says the extra bucks buy better-quality, "guilt-free" seafood.

Not everybody buys the concept.

"I think it's kind of a gimmick to get the treehuggers in," said Boden Hughes, foreman of the Portsmouth Fisherman's Coop in Portsmouth and a gillnetter

(commercial fisherman). "I'm sure it costs a fortune, too. There's plenty of fish out there. Who cares if some company says they sell environmentally friendly fish? They're all environmentally friendly. We're just harvesting."

Lovejoy, 38, just back from the Natural Products Expo East in Washington, D.C., the largest natural products fair in the US, said "natural products is the fastest-growing retail sector in the country."

EcoFish products range from quick-frozen wild Alaska Coho salmon bought almost exclusively from the troll, or hook and line, fishery, to farm-raised bay scallops from Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts.

But most of the fish comes from Alaska and the Pacific Northwest, which tends to have had better-managed fisheries, Lovejoy said, and shipped to restaurants, caterers, health food stores, and gourmet shops across New Hampshire's southern tier.

Lovejoy and his wife Lisa spent a dozen years in the seafood industry before launching EcoFish in 1999.

After growing up outside Boston and spending all his summers in New Hampshire, Lovejoy says anchoring the company's national sales and marketing headquarters in Portsmouth came naturally.

"It's wonderful that consumers in this country are starting to care about this," he said. "It's not as accessible as other products, but we've worked as hard as we can to make it accessible. . . And when you eat EcoFish tuna, you're eating the most sustainable tuna in the world."