

HB

303

STEVE COWPER
GOVERNOR



STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

MAY 14 1987

May 12, 1987

The Honorable Adelheid Herrmann
Co-Chair
House Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
P.O. Box V
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Adelheid,

The prospect of mariculture development is generating considerable interest in Alaska this year. I believe that a mariculture industry can provide substantial economic benefits to our coastal communities and help diversify our economy. However, such an industry must be developed in an orderly fashion which provides the maximum benefit to Alaskans while ensuring protection for our existing fisheries resources, other resource users, and the environment. I have outlined for you the principles I believe must be satisfied to meet these goals. I believe that these principles and the other broad public policy questions that were raised during the public hearings process should be addressed.

I have already directed the state agencies to begin working on the technical issues affecting mariculture development. I believe that it would be beneficial to form a joint interim committee consisting of the Legislature, the administration, and the affected interest groups to resolve the conflicts surrounding mariculture development.

Mariculture holds promise for Alaska, but we must not repeat the mistakes made elsewhere. The development of a mariculture industry in Alaska must not be done piecemeal. We cannot allow a situation to develop here or proceed in the same way that occurred in British Columbia.

I appreciate your support and efforts in helping to resolve these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Cowper".

Steve Cowper
Governor

MAY 11 1987

Dear Sen. Herrmann,

Enclosed is a copy of the letter I sent to all the representatives and senators. I firmly believe in encouraging Alaska's growth of resources. In the past we have all sat back on our oil laurels without promoting other valuable assets of the State and the public is paying dearly for our apathy now. I understand your concern for the sea fishermen, but I really feel our freshwater farming of silver salmon will only help to benefit fishermen by keeping markets buying in Alaska.

Because of this firm belief, I see your latest bill to eliminate salmon farming completely as a disasterous move. A move that will open markets to other states and governments which in time will even shove out the Alaskan fisherman.

I sincerely hope I have shed some light on fish farming and have alleviated some of your fears, at least on fresh water farming.

I may possibly be in Juneau May 15 to address this subject.

Cordially,



Andy Wescott



LITTLE EL DORADO GOLD CAMP TOUR

Andy and Pam Wescott
1132 Lakeview Terrace
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Phone (907) 456-4598 for information

1132 Lakeview Terrace
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
May 9, 1987

Dear Rep. Herrmann,

Andy and I have been working on a project to raise fresh water silver salmon to a selling size of five (5) or six (6) pounds.

Our landlocked salmon will not be released into streams as they will be placed in an enclosed lake where we'll be able to monitor their progress and eliminate chemical pollutants. We will be able to supply buyers with a pure fish. Also, our salmon will not adversely affect tidelands, as they will not be near any, nor will they be able to infect wild stocks in case of disease, which is minimal because of the controlled arena in which they will grow.

Salmon fry will be in-housed the first year and placed into a lake the second for final growth. Eventually, we hope to in-house them their entire growth.

Buyers will be able to purchase fresh fish all year instead of buying from foreign markets nine months of the year. Our capability of supplying during the winter will keep buyers buying in the Alaska market thereby enhancing the sale of Alaskan seafood products.

Each year we will need to collect eggs or secure them from hatcheries as our landlocked salmon will not sexually mature.

We have read House Bill 108 and Senate Bill 106 which seem expressly concerned with the tidelands. To reiterate, we will have no tidelands problems. The new bill introduced by Senator Herrmann to eliminate the farming of salmon completely seems an unnecessary move to try to eliminate an unwarranted threat to the commercial fishermen. Our fresh water salmon will not constitute a threat, but compliment sea fishermen by keeping markets in Alaska all year long.

Discussions with local sports fisheries biologist, Mike Kramer, have been very positive. At this time, extra frys are growing at the Clear Hatchery. Without a positive go on our project these extra fry will be discarded as waste products as there are no funds to place them. I will forego the problem of world hunger at this point.

Besides the market capabilities of our fresh water salmon, the education acquired through our novel project would be beneficial to university students, Fish and Wildlife and the breed itself. In addition to the education we would welcome visitors to the facility.

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Without the acquisition of these salmon this year, our project would be held up for a year until the next group of salmon spawn thereby allowing other world markets to increase their grasp on the salmon trade. If Senator Hermann's protectionist bill passes, it would be a two year or more hold on our project.

So, basically our major problem narrows down to: Do commercial fishermen hold a monopoly on salmon, reared in state hatcheries, in Alaska?

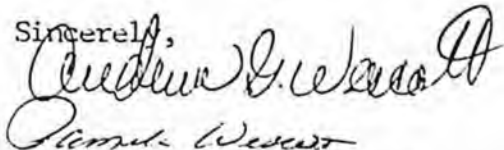
As I have stated throughout this letter, for nine (9) months of the year local markets buy salmon elsewhere, i.e. Sweden. This lapse of salmon availability encourages buyers into other markets where they may possibly stay and not return to Alaska contacts. Our product availability could keep these buyers in the Alaska market thereby securing a trade for sea and fresh water salmon. The concept is the same marketing as placing a Burger King store near a McDonald's. The availability draws the public market and provides both with a handsome income.

When inventive free enterprise is curtailed and limited by the State, everyone feels the impact. Currently, Saudi Arabia is in-housing fish to compete heavily in a world market desperate for more fish, fish which are raised faster and pure of chemicals. Alaska's incapacity to move forward in innovative projects may very well jeopardize market after market of resources.

I have enclosed a copy of an article from U.S. News & World Report concerning catfish farming and the profits to Mississippi by promoting a bottom feeding fish with a previous disgusting reputation.

Andy and I thank you for your time and sincerely hope to become future fresh water salmon farmers.

Sincerely,



Andrew and Pamela Wescott, future fish farmers

P.S. If you'd like more research materials, I have a copy of the work done by the Department of Fisheries at the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

The best thing that's happened to the South since cotton?

A fish tale worth telling

■ "Farm-raised catfish is as mild and fresh tasting as any fish you could ever eat," it says on the box of Mrs. Paul's frozen catfish fillets. Catfish? Yep, but it takes three more puffed-up paragraphs to explain that this is not the ugly, whiskered 10-pound tough guy that dredges the bottom of the Mississippi River for sustenance. No sir. This, says Mrs. Paul's, is an "exquisite" fish.

It's going to take more than three paragraphs for the Richards Group, the new advertising agency for the catfish industry, to convince consumers of that. But last month, for the first time, the nation's catfish farmers anted up \$1.5 million for the Dallas-based firm to try. And jus, in case anybody thought they didn't mean business, last week they brought in Golin Harris, the public-relations firm for companies such as McDonald's and Sara Lee.

"We're tired of this," says Bill Allen, head of the American Catfish Institute, the \$200 million industry's marketing arm in Belzoni, Miss. "We are trying to differentiate our product from the scavenger fish that everybody thinks about."

Farm-raised catfish is, in fact, a different product. Grown in man-made spring-water ponds, the fish is fed a rich diet of grain and minerals. Enjoyed for years by Southerners, who eat it fried with cornmeal fritters called hush puppies, it has shown up lately on menus in trendy Manhattan restaurants responding to the regional-food craze. Last year, Church's, the nation's second-largest fried-chicken chain, bought \$55 million worth of fillets to introduce at their outlets nationwide. But that is not enough. Says Allen: "We want it to be perceived as a classic, Dover-sole kind of fish."

Swimming upstream

Unfortunately, says Richards Group account executive Jeff Upshaw, "there is more than one misconception about catfish." Market research shows that in addition to its reputation as a mud grubber, catfish is believed by some consumers to be good only when fried, while others don't want to prepare it at home because they think it smells bad. Harder to combat is its image as what Upshaw calls a "strictly jeans-and-T-



Diners find the fish produced by Paul Battle's ponds more appealing on a plate

shirt product. People feel it's not chic to order it in an upscale restaurant."

This is a problem that catfish processors have already begun to fight at the food-service level. Delta Catfish Processors, Inc., of Indianola, Miss., the world's largest catfish processor, recently hired New Orleans chef John Folse as a consultant. His demonstrations of elegant recipes such as catfish mousse and pan-sautéed catfish with sauce meunier even are available on video.

In New York, chic delicatessens such as Balducci's and Zabar's carry a smoked version of the fish, and fried catfish is featured on menus from the Gulf Coast restaurant in Greenwich Village to Park Avenue's Ritz Cafe. Delta Catfish Processors' Delta Pride line now

offers preseasoned frozen Catfish Classics to restaurants lacking adventurous chefs. Available in Cajan, butter-garlic and lemon-pepper flavors, they will soon be available in grocery stores.

All this is good news to the ailing farmers of the Mississippi Delta, where 85 percent of the world's catfish is produced. John Dillard, a catfish farmer and stockholder in Delta Catfish Processors, says that this year Mississippi farmers will produce 250 million pounds of catfish—30 million pounds more than last year—and farmers in Arkansas, Alabama and Louisiana will add to the pile. "If we end up with 20 million pounds we can't sell, we're in trouble. We've got to sell them because there's no loan on catfish, no government payments."

Like most catfish farmers, Dillard began growing catfish on unused farmland as a sideline to his main business of cotton, soybean and rice farming. But now, he says, "the catfish business is bigger than our farming operation in terms of dollars." Says Webb Franklin, Mississippi's second-district congressman: "Catfish farming is the only bright spot agriculturally I see in my district."

There even are rumblings of changing the generic name from farm-raised catfish to Mississippi-raised or Delta-raised, a possibility the Richards Group intends to explore. Why not? Idaho has its potatoes and Florida its oranges. Maybe it's time for Mississippi to claim catfish.

CRISP FRIED CATFISH

- 6 small farm-raised catfish fillets
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups yellow cornmeal in a brown paper bag
- 1 quart cooking oil

Sprinkle catfish lightly with salt and pepper. When ready to fry, drop fish into the bag and shake to coat with cornmeal.

Use a deep pot or iron skillet filled half full with cooking oil. Heat until just smoking hot. Place each piece of fish into oil separately. Cook on high heat until fish floats to the top and reaches a golden brown. Drain well on paper towels. Serve hot. Makes 6 servings.



by Julia Reed