

Bumble Bee CEO Derides U.S. Fishing Management

Stinson Seafood Sees Technological Upgrade

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BY TOM WALSH

GOULDSBORO — Having recently invested \$12 million in upgrading its Stinson Seafood facility in Prospect Harbor, Bumble Bee Seafoods is eager to see its herring products plant reach its potential.

"After years of decline, this renovation places Stinson firmly back on the map of sardine processing and ensures a long future for us in Prospect Harbor," Chris Lischewski, president and

CEO, told Governor John E. Baldacci and 35 other corporate and political VIPs attending an open house Feb. 4.

The San Diego-based firm assumed operations of the plant through an April 2004 merger with Connors Bros. of New Brunswick.

During 2004, the plant processed 310,000 cases of sardine products, each case containing 100 individual cans. This year's target is 445,000 cases.

The newly renovated plant, has the capability of producing one million cases, Lischewski said, but that production level is contingent upon stabilizing herring supplies through better management of New England's herring stocks.

"While [Canada] has a responsible fishing management regime in place, the northeast coastal states still practice an 'Olympic' system, where boats are incentivized to catch their entire quota as fast as they can," Lischewski said. "This is an extremely inefficient system and makes it difficult for Stinson to remain competitive as we do not have stability in the raw materials we need to operate our factory.

"It seems it's either feast or famine: too much fish or no fish. This makes it difficult to operate our factory, and is extremely disruptive for our work force, who don't know if they will have consistent work from week to week."

Over the past year, Bumble Bee began working with Maine's fishing industry and with state and local fishery managers to strengthen the herring resource.

"We have formed strategic alliances with fishermen of all gear types, shore-side processors and fishing organizations such as the Downeast Fixed Gear Association," Lischewski said. "We share the concerns of others about the sustainability

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STAFF PHOTO BY TOM WALSH

Governor John Baldacci (left) shared the limelight at the sardine plant in Prospect Harbor with Chris Lischewski, president and CEO of Bumble Bee Seafoods.

Bumble Bee CEO

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of harvest levels in the Gulf of Maine and the recent increase in fishing effort off these shores.

"We know from our experiences in other parts of the country that additional conservation steps must be taken now to protect the Gulf of Maine's herring resource and the livelihoods of those of us who depend on it," he said.

Bumble Bee has learned through its operations in Alaska that fishermen and processors maximize their benefits and strengthen their resource by working together, he said.

"Under today's Olympic system this is virtually impossible," Lischewski said. "When fishermen compete against each other in a race for fish, instead of working with each other, nobody wins."

In recent years the Prospect Harbor plant has not been able to rely on local herring supplies.

"For decades this plant relied exclusively on local fish caught in weirs, in stop nets and by seine vessels," he said. "Today we purchase significant amounts of trawl-caught fish caught as far south as New Jersey, and we are often required to import fish from Canada."

The newly renovated facility, he said, is now capable of processing more than 60 million pounds of herring a year.

"We have 130 employees at this plant and opportunities for additional employment are here

as we stabilize the fish supply," he said. "We could probably double production, and we have the capability of one million cases."

The fate of the smaller Stinson plant in Bath remains uncertain, Lischewski said. No renovations are planned for that facility, which now employs 49 workers.

"That's still something we are evaluating," he said. "There may be opportunities there for cutting and freezing."

In his remarks, Baldacci extended a formal welcome to Bumble Bee and thanked the firm for its investment in and long-term commitment to Maine. "I want to reinforce the importance of this facility to the 132 workers and their families in terms of having year-round employment," he said. "You're going to be able to have the best workers in the best state producing the best product."

Bumble Bee Seafoods is North America's largest canned seafood company.

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