

Local IMTA products featured at Saint John restaurant

Barb Rayner

SAINT JOHN

Local Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) products from Back Bay were featured at a special dinner at the Saint John Ale House Wednesday evening.

A Culinary Celebration of IMTA Products featured three courses and took place during the third annual workshop of the Canadian Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture Network being held this week in Saint John.

IMTA is the practice of growing several species on a single aquaculture site. Here in New Brunswick, IMTA incorporates the growing of mussels and seaweed (kelp) near salmon sites which recreates a food chain and mimics natural ecosystems.

This is a natural recycling system where the mussels filter organic waste particles from the salmon and the seaweed absorbs dissolved inorganic nutrients. The mussels are grown about 50 metres from the salmon cages with the seaweed about 100 metres away.

Chef Jesse Vergen created the first course - mussel escabeche with sherry pickled kelp and mussel "air" - using mussels and kelp gathered from the IMTA site in Back Bay Tuesday.

The main course featured molasses glazed Atlantic salmon, braised fennel, roasted tomatoes, confit potatoes and fire grilled dulse while dessert had a little help from further afield since it featured Irish moss (from PEI) white chocolate panna cotta, lemon crumble and salmon candy.

Dr. Thierry Chopin, UNBSJ bi-

ology professor and scientific director of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada's Multi-Trophic Aquaculture Network, explained that while mussels are already a popular item it is sometimes a little more difficult to encourage people to try kelp so it is often incorporated into other dishes by the local restaurants which are using it.

New Brunswick salmon farmers have been involved for a number of years in studies that have shown that mussels and seaweed grow better near salmon farms than they do away from them. The practice of IMTA began in the Bay of Fundy in 2001.

IMTA is not only responsible, innovative and green but it also has economic benefits for farmers by giving them multiple products to market.



Barb Rayner/Courier

Chef Jesse Vergen of the Saint John Ale House shows some of the kelp gathered from an Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) site in Back Bay which he was preparing for a special culinary celebration of IMTA products Wednesday evening.

Residents dependent on government

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"Because we're a small province, the money tends to be at the federal and provincial levels, but the need is at the local level."

While the province focuses on such things as export of goods such as value-added food, and promotion of communications and aerospace industries, local initiatives are typically geared towards attracting retail businesses, expanding the small service sector and other smaller-scale projects.

St. Stephen's inherent role as a service sector, for example, doesn't mesh with the general provincial economic development efforts currently underway, efforts aimed at export markets, primarily, Campbell suggested.

He also contended the region is too dependent on government income such as pensions, employment insurance and welfare: 22.5 per cent of the area's income is derived from government sources (not including those who work for various levels of government) which is about half the national average. Campbell estimated that when provincial and federal employment is factored in, the region is likely 50 per cent dependent on government revenue - it simply isn't self-sufficient.

Another key obstacle to local growth is a shortage of entrepreneurs in the immediate community. As an example, Campbell stated, 11 per cent of the national workforce is self-employed, whereas only 5.6 per cent in the St. Stephen area are self-employed, Campbell said.

Another issue is age. The median age of the region is 43, meaning the area needs to import youth from elsewhere, said Campbell, in order to balance its demographics.

For such reasons, the future of the region lies in luring out-of-area residents to move into the region, whether from other regions in the province, elsewhere in the country or abroad. Campbell declared that ideally individuals who can exhibit some entrepreneurial spirit with the passion and ability to start some small businesses would go a long way to kick-starting the local economy.

"We have to be deliberate about that: where are people going to come from?"

It is vital, he stressed, to rebalance the local and

county demographics through a concerted effort to attract newcomers to the region. But to do that requires a change in prevailing attitude.

"We're not necessarily comfortable with people from away, but on the other hand, if we want these homes to sell ... We need to bring in people."

People have to love to live here, he stressed, and if that isn't a reality, the region will miss out on key marketing and recruitment asset.

Businesses, be they small or large, need to have significant and defined reasons to move, he said, citing St. Stephen's geographic location - next to the U.S. border, serviced by natural gas, serviced by transportation hubs and featuring spectacular scenery - as particularly attractive, potentially, to external interests. Such assets need to be better marketed.

Future success lies in increased private contributions to economic development initiatives and increased co-operation between area municipalities, said Campbell.

There is no reason for economic development to be focused on urban centres, he continued, urging business people gathered for the event to consider innovative ways of attracting something such as IT businesses to the area.

"This is about re-orienting our thinking," he said, raising the idea of local groups working with provincial bodies to secure funding for such ventures, but any such initiatives need to be extremely focused and detailed to succeed.

In a discussion that followed, Campbell responded to a question from David Ganong, the president and CEO of Ganong Bros., on the need for education.

Education, replied Campbell, may be over-rated. New Brunswick's university-educated graduates are quite likely to leave the province, because the degree doesn't guarantee a job. That disparity, said Campbell, underscores the need for a greater push to encourage entrepreneurial spirit, to encourage young people to launch businesses themselves and thus create new jobs.

In the end, he issued a challenge to those in the room to take action.

"It's about embracing change, stepping up to the plate, and making the community better. You don't want to leave the community worse than your parents did," Campbell said.

"We have to be deliberate about that: where are people going to come from?"

David Campbell

Good catches during first week of lobster season

Barb Rayner

SAINT ANDREWS

Catches have been pretty good for the first week of lobster season and the current price is \$4 a pound.

"It's too early to say how good or bad the season is going to be but I think catches have been decent as far as I have heard," Maria Recchia, executive director of Fundy North Fishermen's Association, said Wednesday.

"I have not heard there have been any big changes and we have had really good catches for the last several years. We have certainly started out with less (than \$4) so it is not too bad.

"We would like \$5 (per pound) but we have not seen that for a long time. The real test is when LFA (Lobster Fishing Area) 34 opens on Monday because that is usually when the price drops."

LFA 34 in Nova Scotia includes Digby and Yarmouth and is the biggest district. Recchia said fishermen there land an incredible amount of lobster so it usually makes the price in this area drop.

Although last year some of the local fishermen continued going out until around Jan. 15 because the price is sometimes higher then, she said the majority of them are all done by Christmas.

This year Recchia said she went to Dipper Harbour for the start of the season which began Nov. 13 - a day later than planned because of the weather - and it was fun to see all the fishermen leaving at once.

"Everyone did great and they had no problems. I think it started out well. We delayed the start for one day because of the wind but they did get out the next day."

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