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REFLECTING THE REGION SINCE 1865 ON THE NEWSSTAND: \$1.13

BUSINESS

KELP: THE NEXT CASH CROP

Barb Rayner

BLACKS HARBOUR

Cooke Aquaculture has now added kelp, certified to the Canadian Organic Aquaculture Standard, to its many products.

The kelps, which are produced at the company's Charlie Cove farm site near Back Bay, are being marketed under its True North Salmon brand.

The company is producing two species of kelps - winged and sugar kelps - known for their superior sweetness and flavour. These seaweeds can be eaten fresh or cooked.

Andrew Lively, marketing director with True North Salmon, the processing and sales arm of Cooke Aquaculture, said the company has been producing kelp for about four years now but the change is that it is now organically certified.

"We have been selling it to local restaurants for about four years. You can have it at the Rossmount (Inn) and you can buy it at the Saint John city market. What is happening now is we have this organic certification. We felt organic certification would be an added selling feature."

The kelp is also being used by different cosmetic companies in Europe for seaweed face packs and Lively said there is a growing market for the product.

For the cosmetic market he said the kelp is used in its dry form and the company is not exporting any of the wet product yet but it is talking to people in the U.S. right now.

"One of the interesting things about kelp is that it is a great dietary source of food. It is a very efficient food and more and more people are starting to find out it is great tasting and good for them. Demand is growing for it."

Lively said the company is currently harvesting the organically certified product and, as of Friday, was able to start selling it.

"The fact that we have great tides and clean water is an



Image provided

Workers with True North Salmon harvest a long strand of kelp, a cash crop that forms part of an integrated system featuring different organisms (such as mussels) grown symbiotically next to salmon farms.

advantage in our area. There is a lot of potential for this to grow."

The company is producing tens of thousands of pounds of kelp and he is hoping that the number will grow.

"Seaweeds, like kelps, are popular around the world and in North America we are discovering how easy they are to prepare and how delicious and healthy they are.

"Our sales team has been identifying a wide range of potential customers, such as chefs, restaurants and non-food sectors like the cosmetic and feed industries."

The certification to the Canadian Organic Aquaculture Standard comes following third party audits by SAI Global, an internationally accredited certification company.

The Charlie Cove site is an Integrated Multi-Trophic

Aquaculture (IMTA) farm, which means that it raises species from different trophic levels and is designed to mimic the natural ocean eco-system where many seaweeds and animals co-exist.

The farm raises fish that are fed along with seaweeds and shellfish that are extractive - which means that they absorb nutrients from their environment. In this case, the Charlie Cove farm produces the kelps along with blue mussels and Atlantic salmon.

This IMTA venture is a collaborative project between Cooke Aquaculture, the University of New Brunswick and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The UNB team, led by Dr. Thierry Chopin, assists in managing the kelp portion of the IMTA farm by collecting mature kelps in the summer and using them to cultivate stock for the next grow-out cycle.

By late fall, the kelps are transferred from the UNB team to the Cooke IMTA ocean site, where the farm crew cares for the kelps as part of the farm's operation. The kelps are ready for harvest in late spring/early summer. The finished products can be delivered to customers either wet or dry.

Grown as part of the IMTA system, the kelps receive essential nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which are by-products of the natural metabolic processes of salmon and mussels. No growth enhancers are required.

Once harvested, the kelps are rinsed with seawater and dried with no additional manufacturing aids. Any cleaning and disinfection of harvest vessels and equipment destined for the organic production site is done with products that are listed and approved by the Organic Aquaculture Standard.

Lively said Cooke Aquaculture, which has been involved with IMTA for about eight years, has up to six IMTA sites but will not be able to harvest from all of them at the same time.

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