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Chairman—CHARLES E. JACKSON, General Manager, National Fisheries Institute, Washington, D. C.

The Future Of The Red Snapper Fishery

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IT SHOULD BE SAID at the outset that the writer has no idea as to what the future of the red snapper will be. However, certain speculations can be made which may be of interest.

The history of the red snapper industry dates back some seventy-five years when the pilot boats off Pensacola started fishing for red snapper while waiting for sailing vessels that they could pilot into Pensacola harbor. Initially these fish were brought to Pensacola and consumed locally; however, two enterprising Yankees arrived, built fish houses, imported natural ice from Maine and began to ship the fish inland. Gradually these companies, Warren Fish Company and E. E. Saunders & Company, accumulated fishing vessels of their own and at one time Saunders had as many as forty fishing vessels working. The fleet of Warren Fish Company never was quite so large but at one time it comprised a great many more vessels than at present. During this period the vessels were all propelled by sail. Good seamen were always available from among those who deserted from the sailing ships which were always so numerous in the harbor. During this period both companies flourished. As time passed because of new immigration laws, the sailing ships disappeared and fishermen became scarcer. The fishing fleets gradually became smaller as vessels which disappeared from the fleets were not promptly replaced. In the meantime, numerous other companies entered the field of production of the red snapper. Their efforts probably have helped the industry as a whole, even though some of them have provided stiff competition.

The industry has had serious problems. Among these have been a shortage of fishermen, the cost of replacing vessels, increased express rates, and, later the increased importance of packaged fish. Nonetheless, the fishing has survived, and its future seems quite bright despite the problems which have to be solved.

There are two principal factors which will probably prevent the complete collapse of the industry. The first and most important one is the excellence in terms of flavor and keeping qualities of the red snapper itself. The second is the number of tourists from inland who come to the Gulf each year to fish for red snapper, and who carry both their experience and their fish back home. An industry does not sit still, and there have been many changes in methods of operation since the early days, and the writer foresees many more changes yet to come.

It is unlikely that filleting of red snapper will be one of the changes because of the cost of production, which would make packaged red snapper too expensive for the average housewife. Nonetheless, boneless snapper tenderloin at \$1.00 per pound is actually better value than drawn fish at .30c. Some of the

changes which have come into being to date are the reduction in the amount of sail used and the installation of Diesel engines. Further, the installation of sonic depth finding equipment and the use of two way radio are both increasing. The installation of engines has not increased the amount of fish produced, as we had originally anticipated, but by decreasing the sail area there has come about a reduction in the upkeep on rigging, etc. It is likely that the overall cost of operating has not been materially increased, and trips are made more regularly by increased use of power boats. The addition of sonic equipment has greatly facilitated the finding of more fishing grounds and there are many captains who would not go to sea without this additional aid.

The market for the product has nearly always been in excess of production. Our sales manager has often stated that if we could always have a supply of first quality of fish on hand the job of selling would require little effort.

A problem facing the fishery at present is cost of production. The present production methods are all hand work and both slow and tedious, and the equipment used is expensive to operate and maintain. However, there is hope that electric reels can be constructed to increase the catch materially even to the point of doubling the production of each vessel per trip. A further possible improvement is the use of antiseptic ice. Fish spoilage is from two sources. The first is chemical decomposition and the second is the result of bacterial action. Recent technological studies seem to prove conclusively that fish flesh itself is sterile and that deterioration and spoilage occurs through the action of bacteria which penetrate from the outside. If, therefore, the development of these bacteria can be substantially retarded, the "useful" life of the fish can be correspondingly prolonged. The writer is quite convinced from the experiments which the Warren Fish Company has carried on that there are chemicals which can be added to ice which will materially reduce the bacterial growth, which in turn will mean the landing of first quality fish, even though the vessel has remained longer at sea than she should have. In this particular field there is a great deal of worthwhile research work necessary. On the Pacific Coast there is a product called Nobac Ice which so far has not proven particularly successful. However, from the few experiments by our company, there appears to be a great future for some such product. It should be kept in mind, however, that the fish have to receive *other than* a warm reception from the time they leave the water until they are delivered to the ultimate consumer. It is discouraging to see fish unloaded at a dock in poor condition purely from lack of care. Some of our experiments have definitely proven that the quality of fish can be maintained if they are properly taken care of from the time they leave the water until they reach the dock.

It is fully appreciated that it is not usually good practice to have a vessel equipped for doing several different types of fishing, because there is always a doubt as to what type of fishing she should be engaged in. However, it appears that with the rapid increase in the number of vessels being added to the shrimp fleet, sooner or later it would be more profitable for some of these vessels to fish for snapper during certain seasons of the year.

If a shrimp vessel were properly designed so that she could carry a larger crew, and if the vessels were equipped with electric reels, they could very profitably operate as a part of the red snapper fleet.

In this connection it is urged that any such vessels arrange to fish for some wholesale plant that has an outlet for red snapper, for the reason that such a house has regular channels of distribution and can afford to pay more for the

catch. Also, the small fish houses which only occasionally get in such fish usually dump their merchandise for what they can get for it, thus demoralizing the market for those who handle the product regularly. The customers inland would prefer to place their orders with those companies who can be reasonably expected to supply their needs.

Any inland distributor who handles red snapper regularly is in favor of the comparatively stable prices maintained throughout the red snapper industry, rather than the rapid and wide fluctuations in the prices of some other varieties. Spanish mackerel is a glaring example of a fish which fluctuates greatly in price, so that the buyer scarcely knows from one hour to the next what the market may be, or what his competitors may have paid.

A good deal of the success of the red snapper industry to date has been in the cooperation between the companies involved. For example, it may surprise you to know that our sales manager disposes of the catches of three or four of our smaller competitors. By moving a larger volume of fish in this way through one outlet, the producers get more orders and a greater demand for their products, and the advantage to us arises out of the more dependable supply provided our customers.

Of course, the red snapper industry exists because people eat fish. And following the same line of reasoning, the greater the demand, the more successful will fish dealers be. The same cooperation which has proven so successful in this industry should be extended to all branches of the seafood industry, and all would profit thereby.

Some three years ago the National Fisheries Institute was formed for the specific purpose of acting as a coordinating agency for the entire industry, and in this objective it has done an outstanding work. It needs more members, more financial support, and it is urged that all dealers become associated with the organization's activities.

To sum up: the writer is more than convinced that if the dealers cooperate and produce fresher products, thereby creating more demand, the future of the red snapper industry along with that of its friendly competitors will be a happy one.

Problems Of Administration And Transportation In The Wholesale Fisheries Industry

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TWO PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS confronting the wholesale fish business are those of administration and transportation.

The problem of transportation is undoubtedly the greater. Since April, 1940, the writer has participated in two hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission on controversial rate increases by the American Express Agency. In the matter of icing charges the industry was successful in defeating the proposal. In June of this year dealers opposed a suggested increase in minimum billing weights, which at this writing has not been decided. In issues of this type the industry is constantly on the defensive and is continually battling for its existence. Transportation costs have increased so extensively since 1946 as to make them a definite threat for future business. In many cases these