

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14

*Chairman*—CLARENCE P. IDYLL, Research Associate, Marine Laboratory, University of Miami

## **How Can Sales of Southern Fish Be Improved in Northern Markets?**

FRANK W. WILKISSON

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FROM A WHOLESALER'S POINT OF VIEW and experience, the prime factors in building up sales in seafood are quality, honest weight, uniformly graded and packed merchandise and a steady production with a fair price. The former can be controlled, but the latter regarding production is subject to causes beyond the powers of man. We can take these items one at a time and point out why they are necessary to provide a healthy market. As we all know, from our own domestic experiences, palatable seafood makes people take second helpings. It can only be palatable if it is of good quality. Poor quality has to be doctored up with sauces and dressings which destroy the delicate flavor of seafood and are usually so strong that they upset the digestive system of all those who try them and then the seafood is blamed. Which in truth is proper, but who suffers? The industry does. This is mentioned because so many short-sighted fishermen and packers take the attitude that someone will buy their product regardless of its condition. In other words they feel that there is a market for anything. This is true when supplies are short but does it boost sales? If anything, it hurts future sales because someone with good trade may get one of these poor packages and have it dumped in his lap by the consumers. The retailer is then finished as far as that variety goes and complains to the dealer. The dealer is skeptical the next time a packer tries to sell him again. He may take a chance on a few, when he should be buying more than he did the first time to fill the demand he created by distributing excellent quality merchandise.

The start of quality is the fisherman's job. He has to take the proper amount of ice with him to chill the fresh caught fish. He should also pack the fish instead of letting it lie on the deck. The greatest amount of deterioration takes place while the body heat is still in the fish. The next step is to gut the fish as soon as possible after being caught and to do a thorough job of cleaning out the fish. We sometimes receive "gutted" fish with half the entrails left in. The packer can inspect the catch and then see that it is properly packed in new boxes with plenty of ice for shipment to our Northern Markets.

Another important thing is weight. Some producers and packers are habitual offenders with short weight. They completely forget that seafood shrinks a certain percentage when packed fresh. To offset this, extra weight should be added. Some also feel that a fish or two won't be missed. Our greatest trouble is short weight in Southern packages. It has reached a point where it is difficult to sell a box or a barrel of fish as a package and not by weight. One must

realize that a five or seven pound shortage even at twenty cents per pound amounts to an additional cost from one to one and a half dollars per box to the retailer. He naturally has to pass this extra cost to the ultimate consumer, who will not be too pleased at this increase in his food expense. Another thing noticed is the non-uniformity of the various packages as far as fish sizes go. Many varieties are packed from a half pound to three or more pounds which makes it hard for a distributor to sell. They should be properly culled and graded small, medium and large. This would help the dealer or distributor find the proper market for the merchandise. Some markets can use large quantities of certain size fish whereas if they are received mixed the dealer sometimes has to pick his size and then reship the remainder to some commission house to sell for his account. This is a very unprofitable set up and forces a dealer or distributor to curtail his buying quantities of that particular variety, because of the amount of work involved and the gamble on the possible resulting profit.

Stories are heard of price contracts being made with the fishermen at the beginning of a season when certain varieties are fairly scarce. Naturally the price is usually high, too high for comfort. The dealer is wary and only buys from the packer a part of what he could really use if the price was reasonable. The fisherman, with a good price guaranteed, sets forth and usually over produces, overloads the packer who is forced to ship on consignment. This usually gluts the various markets and everyone gets frightened and steers clear of that variety because of its extreme drop in price. The packer then wants to reduce his contract price to the fisherman who gets angry and goes on a strike. There being no production for awhile, that variety is off the market and consequently removed from the minds of the dealers who wish they had never seen this particular fish. When it is produced again the cycle returns. Spanish mackerel, mullet and king mackerel are the types that are produced heaviest and they are the biggest headaches as far as our Northern marketing is concerned.

It has reached a point in New York that when we receive a call from a packer we can tell what quality, what cull and how short the packages will be when he tells up the point of production. We have tried many times in the past to impress them with the facts stated but they still take the attitude that "if you don't want it someone else does." Again that may be true, but will it consume the additional production he could no doubt bring in? Will it remove the glut period and create a steady market during that time which would give him a small profit instead of a large loss? Will it enlarge the consumer demand? Although it is only one man's opinion, the writer says no. In fact it may be said that the current demand will even fall off, because of the increased quality food products now competing for the consumer dollar, unless we in the industry wake up and get on the quality band wagon.

In conclusion, the writer thinks that such a representative group could take the lead in promoting a program to improve the quality and grading of the fishing products produced in the states or countries they represent.

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## **The Development of the Brownsville Shrimp Industry**

*W. L. HARDEE, Hardee Fish Co., Brownsville, Texas*

This paper will describe the phenomenal change that has taken place in the shrimping industry in the lower gulf area from 1930 to the present time. With the closing of the Bay area on the lower Texas Coast in 1930, the fleet of