

## Chapter 11

# SETTING UP THE BOAT FOR OFF-THE-BOAT SALES AND ONBOARD PROCESSING

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*Using your boat as a home base for direct sales can be pretty simple, and selling seafood from your boat may not require much change to your basic fishing operation. However, not all harbors permit such activity.*

Selling off the boat can be more complex if you want to process your product on the boat and then sell it. Processing seafood even while on your boat requires additional investment and jumping through numerous regulatory hoops. Legal requirements governing direct marketing and onboard process activities vary by location. Your first task is to contact the relevant state and local agencies where you plan to operate.

## OFF-THE-BOAT SALES

To retail unprocessed catch to the public directly from your fishing boat, you may not need to alter your boat at all. You can take product out of the hold and hand it directly to your customer. But there are things you should do to improve your setup. Help make your customers' trip to the boat to buy your product an enjoyable experience and they will be more likely to come back for more and recommend you to others.

- **Try to tie up in an easily accessible place.** a long walk to the end of a float can discourage customers, particularly if they have to lug a heavy load of fish back to their car. Work with your harbormaster to establish a service-oriented experience for seafood consumers at your harbor.
- **Keep your boat shipshape and clean.** Extra care is warranted when retailing to the public. Retail customers may be put off by gear piled on deck and fish coming out of bloody slush ice. Fish ready for sale should look as good as those at a seafood counter.
- **No pets.** It's unsanitary to have dogs or cats running around where you are selling food.
- **Be mindful of kids.** While many customers appreciate a family operation, it's unwise to allow kids to play on deck.
- **Maintain a covered area.** The FDA requires a covered area. a cover protects the product from "avian fecal contamination." If you can set up a cover that also offers your customers a little shelter from the rain, that's a good idea too. This structure does not need to be permanent and can be as simple as a pop up roof tent.
- **Keep enough change on hand.** Credit card terminals for tablets and smartphones and mobile payment services simplify transactions and are the preferred method of payment for most people now, but some continue to pay in cash. Be prepared to break a \$100 bill. Many off-the-boat fish sales are made on weekends, when banks are closed. Having a simple cash box makes things easier.
- **Use nice signage.** a scrap of cardboard with a hastily scribbled note in marker pen doesn't speak well of your business. Make some legible signs. If you can't print neatly, find a friend, relative or fellow fisherman who can. Sign printing companies make attractive custom vinyl lettering that you can apply to your own backing or signboard. Include a price list. a chalkboard can look very nice and allow you to make changes as needed. For directional signs and other signage off the boat, be accurate and clear. Don't forget to check with

the harbormaster and other authorities about posting signs in public areas.

- **Hang a large custom banner.** Include the business name, phone number, social media sites, and large colorful pictures of your products to attract customers. a banner can be attached to a standard pop-up tent.
- **Long customer line.** The use of stanchions for long lines can be helpful to avoid a large group in front of your booth and makes sure customers are helped in the order they arrive.
- **Bags or boxes.** Customers need a way to get their purchases back to their car in some sort of packaging that won't leak fish juices all over everything. Make sure you have enough on hand. Waxed boxes are great and people are often willing to pay for them to protect their car interiors. Paper and plastic bags are also good for packaging. Make sure to keep the outer bag dry. That means not handing the bag to the customer with a fishy glove on. For returning customers, encourage them to bring their own bags or coolers. Don't forget ice!
- **Carry the product to the customer's car,** if you can break away to do it. a couple of fish or crab in a plastic bag can be a real load. Obviously, you have to weigh this against being away from the boat. This kind of service will get you remembered and referred to other potential customers.
- **Be prepared to answer questions.** Customers may have questions about the product species, proper storage techniques, and preparation methods. Additionally, customers may be curious about when and where the product was caught. Let customers know how you and your regular customers prepare the product, especially for lesser-known species.
- **You are a professional, so act like a professional.** In your personal comportment and in the way you do business, it helps to be scout-like: "Trustworthy, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Clean." Treat customers honestly. Answer questions cheerfully, and don't look or act unprofessional. Finally, be businesslike.
- **Scale.** You will need a scale if you are selling your product by the pound. a certified scale is required in most states. This is an annual requirement in California by the Department of Weights and Measures.
- **Receiver's License or Fisherman's Retail License.** Check to see what licenses are required to sell direct to the public in your state. For example, in California, a fisherman's retail license allows you to sell your catch to the public. a receiver's license allows you to sell your catch to the public and sell the catch of other licensed fishermen.
- **Ice.** All the fish should be covered with ice. You will also need additional ice and an ice scoop on hand to use for your display as the ice melts. Clean ice should be used for your display. The ice can also be used for customers' bags and coolers.
- **Merchandising.** Take the extra effort to make your display look nice. Lay out items in an orderly way that is visually appealing, don't use dirty ice from your fishy coolers, and place signage with species name and price where it is easy to see. Using tablecloths over folding tables makes for a nice-looking booth.
- **Organization.** Have all items needed for the market in containers that are easily restocked and ready to go. Forgetting the scale, cash or bags can make for a rough start at the market if you are trying to buy, borrow or having to go back home.
- **Equipment.** Make sure totes and coolers are scrubbed and clean so customers are not turned off by their food coming out of dirty containers. Plastic tubs can be used to put the product on the scale. This will keep the scale clean and free from water damage. Have a back up for when your electronics don't work. This may mean having an extra card reader. Replace old equipment when it starts to look worn and doesn't look clean even with a good scrubbing. Keep old worn equipment on the boat or out of sight.
- **Insurance.** It's a good idea to have some liability insurance. FLIP (Food Liability Insurance Program) has options for farmers markets, food trailers, caterers, and more. It is worth checking out a few companies and deciding which company is best for you.

Although land-based dockside or fishermen's markets are different from off-the-boat sales, they are often allowed in the same ports. For information on how to participate in a dockside or fishermen's market, visit California Sea Grant's website for the guide, "*How to Participate in a Fishermen's Market.*"

**Visit the Sea Grant "Market Your Catch" website for more information about selling your catch through off-the-boat sales:** <https://marketyourcatch.msi.ucsb.edu/alternative-market-types/boatover-bank-sales>

More information setting up or participating in a fishermen's or farmers market can be found in Chapter 12.

## ONBOARD PROCESSING... SO, YOU WANT TO PROCESS YOUR CATCH?

*Adapted from "Working with a Broker or Trader,"  
Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, 2010,  
Sunny Rice, Quentin Fong and Glenn Haight*

This is a dream of many seafood producers who want to improve the return they get from their harvest. Some sell their onboard processed harvest to regular processors on shore—many freezer trollers do this for example. For others the motivation is direct marketing. For all such operations, a few basic concepts apply.

**Space.** Get as much room as you can afford. If you are starting from scratch, buy the biggest platform you can. If you are constrained by your existing boat, do all you can to free up space so you have enough room to process.

Think through your process from start to finish. How is the catch landed and moved around the boat or facility?

What will happen to the catch, and where? How will it be stored? Regulations vary from one jurisdiction to another. Read and understand the regulations and talk with the responsible authorities before setting up your vessel or small shore operation for direct market processing.

Regulatory authorities want to help you succeed and often can supply a lot of good advice, but remember, their first responsibility is to ensure public food safety. Refer to Appendices E, F, G, and H for state-specific regulations in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California.

**Surfaces.** The surfaces that come into direct contact with your product must be of food-grade materials that are easy to clean and sanitize, do not impart tastes or odors and do not promote bacterial growth and contamination. Regulations in your area may allow properly treated wood surfaces, but nonporous metal and food-grade plastics are best, and when it comes to metals, go stainless. Some operations use aluminum tables, but aluminum corrodes and pits easily. Good-quality stainless steel is durable, easy to clean and resistant to chemicals and corrosion. It may be expensive, but bargain deals may be found at restaurant supply stores. Oftentimes, standard restaurant shelving, cutting tables and sink setups can be used directly or customized to work on a boat. Some locations require the use of National Sanitation Foundation certified equipment: be sure to check with your local health department for requirements.

Nonfood contact surfaces in your processing area must also be addressed. Processing functions need protection from the elements and from outside sources of contamination. Many boats use converted aluminum bait sheds for processing purposes, but pay attention to:

- **The interior framing** to make sure surfaces drain well, don't readily accumulate dirt and contaminants, and are easy to reach with cleaners and sanitizers. These principles apply to processing shelters made of other materials as well. Ideally, onboard processing areas should be lined with impervious, easy-to-clean, nonporous paneling, just like that used in onshore processing operations.
- **Possible sources of contamination**, such as fuel or hydraulic lines, should be re-routed and/or shielded to prevent drips or leaks from contaminating product or product contact surfaces. This may include running such lines through protective conduit or routing them below or outside processing areas. For hydraulics, consider switching to food-grade fluid if re-routing is difficult or costly. You may have to do this anyway if you are using hydraulic power in your processing line to power a conveyor or similar machinery.
- **The floor of your processing area** should be designed to be flushed and easily cleaned and sanitized. False decks that are common on many fishing boats can readily accumulate gurry and contaminants. Grating should be easy to lift and clean.

**Lighting.** Your processing area should be bright. This is important for properly working with your seafood product and for effective cleanup and sanitation. Regulations may prescribe required illumination levels. Lighting in processing areas should be safety-type fixtures suitable for marine environments and must be designed to prevent breakage and contamination of product and surfaces.

**Water supply.** Regulations in your area are likely to be quite specific about process water supply. Clean seawater may or may not be acceptable for primary rinsing or product transport, but will not be accepted for initial product processing operations unless water treatment operations are installed on the vessel. Check regulations in your areas. In any case:

- Avoid using any highly turbid or nearshore waters.
- Never use water taken from inside a harbor, due to water quality concerns.
- Stay away from other vessels while processing because you could accidentally pick up what they may be discharging.
- Do not flush your head or pump out sanitary holding tanks while drawing food contact water. Your water and sanitary systems should have valves that physically prevent this possibility, even if that is not a requirement of regulations in your area.
- Make sure that your processing water system is segregated from any other pumping system. Cross-connections with bilge pumps and other non-sanitary systems are not permissible.

Systems are available to provide continuous treatment of processing water with chlorine, quaternary ammonia or other agents, including acidified chlorine dioxide and ozone. Many water bodies now forbid the discharge of chlorinated water so be aware of local EPA and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) requirements. If using batch chlorination, give products a thorough final rinse in the chlorinated solution, keep careful tabs on residual chlorination levels (such checks are likely specified in regulation) and change the solution frequently.

**Discharge of process water.** If you are permitted to conduct processing activities on board your vessel, make sure you are aware and correctly permitted for discharge of your process wastewater. Process wastewater is defined as any water that has touched fish during the process activities—even if that water does not include blood or gurry. Discharge requirements can be strict and penalties for non-compliance are high.

**Cleaning and sanitizing.** You simply must keep your processing area clean. Effective cleaning and sanitizing starts with good organization. Your processing area should be simple and uncluttered. Eliminate hard-to-clean nooks and crannies and keep processing surfaces accessible. Bleeding tanks, cutting tables and other processing areas should be flushed regularly and kept free of excessive buildup of blood and gurry while processing.

Cleaning and sanitizing should begin immediately after you have finished processing. First remove all large pieces of meat and gurry and then complete a wash down with plenty of clean water. Follow with a good scrubbing of all surfaces using a detergent that is approved for food processing areas. Do not use phenolic cleaners such as Lysol® or Pine-Sol® or any scented cleaner as these can affect the flavor and smell of your product. Keep a good set of scrub brushes on hand, specifically for these cleaning purposes. Brushes and plenty of elbow grease can do a fine job. Remember to give a little extra effort to those hard-to-reach places that can harbor bacteria. Thoroughly rinse off all detergent. Next, apply a sanitizing solution throughout the processing area. An effective sanitizing solution can be prepared with simple household bleach and clean water in areas where chlorine is allowed to be discharged to the water.

Pressure washers are excellent for cleaning and sanitizing and can significantly reduce your workload. Pressure washer units designed for marine use are available at reasonable prices. They can be mounted in your engine room, with outlets conveniently located on deck, where they are needed.

For more information on preparing a vessel for onboard processing and direct market sales, see The Onboard DEC Inspection, by Torie Baker of Alaska Sea Grant.

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