

Fishery Resource Grant Program

Final Report

**Market Development for Cownose Ray**

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## **Summary:**

During this past season we purchased roughly 261,602 lbs of Ray from several fishermen with an average weight of 33 lb. The original goal was to purchase 200,000. Lbs, from fisherman. Do to some large landings we reached the goal with more then 2 months left in the season. Having developed good retail sales through Wegamns we continued to buy Ray to try and keep this market open. This accounts for approximately 8,000 Rays when added to the Rays purchased from other packing companies around the Bay. Of 47 separate purchases directly from fisherman, 9 of these were between 10,000 and 20,000. Lb. landings. While this is great for the fisherman it is not possible to get this large of a catch processed without markets for whole frozen wings. We continue to search for this whole frozen market but have not had any orders for whole frozen wings in 4 years. This means that during the large landing much of the ray are discarded and not processed. We are in the process of working with fisherman to establish a maximum landing limit per trip in order to prevent needless waste.

During the season we had a very successful marketing campaign with Wegamns stores which resulted in approximately 6,000 lbs of fresh fillet orders. We were also able to sell approximately 2,000 lb of other fresh filets to several other wholesalers through out the country. We put up approximately 2500 lbs of frozen fillets to distribute during the off season, which have mainly been used as samples for prospective customers. This is a considerable increase in sales.

We tried with no success to market the value added products from last season. Much of the remaining value added ray products are about to reach their 18 month expiration dates and will have to be discarded.

During the last month of the season we began to get some interested for bait. We had tried without much success to market the waste from processing as bait and had disposed of much of the waste through the season at local land fills. We manage to put up about 25,000 lb of bait before the season ended, but could have quadrupled that number from the processing through out the season if we had known about the possible bait shortage.

## **Conclusions:**

The market for Cownose Ray continues to grow, but has not reached a stage where it can sustain itself. During this past season we have been successful in marketing fresh fillets to retail and wholesale outlets, while the attempts to develop a market for any value added products have completely disappeared. We have tried unsuccessfully to market the waste from processing for bait, however at the end of this season we received several request for some for bait to be used in conjunction with horse crabs for the east coast conch fishery. The timing of this was disappointing, because without a market the waste from processing was discarded. We hope that we can exploit this trend during the next season.

We believe that this fishery has a future in the Chesapeake region and can sustain itself, but will need continued help for several more years. Each year the market grows, however this is so different then any other product from the Bay that it will take time to catch on. We have developed efficient ways to process and will continue to expand the markets for both food and bait.

We believe we can be more efficient in the future by limiting the large landings until we have a market to sustain that type of quantity. It will take less money to help subsidize this fishery by focusing on smaller catches and then maximizing the value of that catch.