OPINION: Processors need to pay for quality

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I recently wrote an article on how fishermen have been raising the bar on quality in the Bristol Bay. This article has generated some interest, and a few follow up questions. One reader posed a question about how we can get the other half of the fleet to adopt these salmon quality improvements.

Here is my response: processors need to start paying for quality. This is a three-pronged approach, which is going to be difficult for both processors and harvesters to accept. The first step is to take away production bonuses. It may seem simple enough, but there are some serious disincentives currently that make quality salmon production a losing proposition for some fishermen. Production bonuses are one of these disincentives to producing a quality product. Why are we paying harvesters more for overfilling brailer bags, when we should be paying bonuses in for bringing in the very best fish that they can. The second step is to always pay an ice bonus. Not a negligible one that doesn’t add up when you factor in the cost of purchasing the ice, but a real bonus that adds up to dollars and cents. This money comes back to the processors in the form of a higher price in the marketplace. The third thing that should happen (and some fishermen are going to resent me for saying this, but here goes): mandate cooling of all fisheries products. Some high quality producers (such as Leader Creek Fisheries) have already done this.

If processors and harvesters adopt these three measures, this will lead to a 100 percent quality improvement in Bristol Bay. This will not only elevate the quality (and subsequently the price) of our salmon product, it will also improve the marketability of Bristol Bay salmon as a quality product.

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