Santa Monica Seafood backs Alaska crab research

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THE largest seafood retailer in the U.S. Southwest has set its sights on Alaska king crab.

Santa Monica Seafood, a family-owned seafood company based in Santa Monica, California, made a donation to Alaska Sea Grant for its research programme aimed at rebuilding Alaska’s collapsed red and blue king crab stocks.

“Santa Monica Seafood has been working hard to become a leader in responsible seafood sourcing,” said Logan Kock, vice president for responsible sourcing at Santa Monica Seafood. “Part of this effort involves participating in fishery management dialogue and partnerships that drive change and improvement in how seafood resources are managed, improved and used. The work being done by Alaska Sea Grant to rebuild Alaska’s king crab is a perfect fit for us.”

David Christie, director of Alaska Sea Grant, welcomed the donation: “This unsolicited donation affirms the value of the scientific research we and our partners are conducting to learn how to raise large numbers of wild king crab in a hatchery setting,” said Christie. “We are creating the technical expertise and scientific knowledge needed to understand how to rebuild king crab in areas where their populations have plummeted.”

Christie said the money will be used to support research being done by the Alaska King Crab Research, Rehabilitation and Biology Program (AKCRRAB), a partnership between Alaska Sea Grant, regional fishermen’s groups, coastal communities, NOAA Fisheries, the Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery and Chugach Regional Resources Commission, and the UAF School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences.

AKCRRAB formed in 2005 to develop the scientific research and methods needed to determine whether hatcheries can play a role in rebuilding collapsed red king crab stocks in places like Kodiak Island, where there has not been a red king crab commercial fishery in nearly three decades. The group also is conducting similar research with blue king crab in the hopes of one day helping those depleted stocks recover in the Pribilof Islands region of the Bering Sea.

Drawing on lessons learned each year, AKCRRAB scientists at the Alutiiq Pride Hatchery in Seward, Alaska, have steadily applied what they’ve learned about water temperature, flow rate, and artificial habitat—all designed to improve larval survival and hatchery productivity. They also experimented with food, what kind, how much, and when to feed the growing crab.

The adjustments paid off this year with faster growth and improved survival of the larval red king crab. This year, 2.7 million red king crab successfully hatched from some 18 female red king crab.

Scientists in Seward, as well as Juneau, Kodiak, and Newport, Oregon, are using the juvenile crab produced at the hatchery in experiments designed to better understand how to raise crab in a hatchery and to further understand how such hatchery-born crabs might fare in the wild. Genetic studies to differentiate between hatchery-born crab and wild crab...
also are under way.

Understanding the details of hatching and raising king crab in a hatchery is considered by commercial fishermen and researchers as a key step toward providing state fishery managers with the information they need to decide whether hatchery enhancement can help rebuild depleted king crab stocks.

Santa Monica Seafood’s Logan Kock said he sees his company’s involvement with Alaska crab research as a long-term investment in the state’s resources.

“This year, we are contributing to national and international efforts in fishery management, education, gear improvement, stock enhancement, and improving our sourcing of seafood,” Kock said. “We fully expect to consolidate as we go forward, driving more funds into fewer programmes on a continuous basis. King crab will be one of them.”