

Northern Shrimp on The Move Southward

On the Atlantic Coast, the northern shrimp fishery appears to be edging southward.

According to reports from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries (BCF), the northern shrimp was formerly harvested almost exclusively within 50 miles of Portland, Maine, and marketed as "Maine shrimp."

Under the auspices of BCF, frozen Maine shrimp have been displayed at international food fairs. Since the product was first introduced in London in 1966, it has been received with enthusiasm in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the Netherlands, Charles H. Meacham, Commissioner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, noted.

Approximately 50 per cent of Maine's shrimp production for the 1968-69 season was exported to Western Europe, most of it to Sweden.

Biologists do not know where these deep-water shrimp mature, but they move in toward shore to spawn, and are caught during the shoreward migrations. Maine's commercial fishermen have generally harvested the small pink shrimp as a winter crop, from September or October into April or May.

However, exploratory fishing work by BCF has demonstrated that the shrimp are within reach of vessels from other coastal states—and that the traditional shrimping season can be extended to include the summer months, Mr. Meacham said.

As a result, vessels from Massachusetts and New Hampshire moved into the fishery last year. Maine fishermen held the lead for the 1969 catch with about 24.5 million pounds valued at approximately \$3 million; Massachusetts landed a healthy 4.5 million pounds worth about \$500,000, and New Hampshire trailed with about 100,000 pounds valued at roughly \$12,000.

Meanwhile, a new processing plant, capable of handling up to 200,000 pounds of shrimp a day, is under construction on Gloucester's State Fish Pier.

This expansion leads BCF marketing specialists to speculate that the delicately flavored crustacean may be more widely marketed in the future under a more general name.

In the Gloucester area, the choice of a name is purely academic to those not engaged in marketing activities. There, it is "just shrimp," because the northern pink shrimp is the area's only commercial species.

In Florida, the picture is somewhat different. Here, fishermen land four different species—the small white shrimp, a somewhat larger brown shrimp, the southern pink (not the same species as the northern shrimp), and Royal Reds.

Even in the face of such formidable competition, the delicate flavor of the northern shrimp, which is marketed frozen, as a novelty, has won it considerable popularity among Florida gourmets.

Northern shrimp are both too small and too delicate to be processed by conventional methods. Until the relatively recent development of special equipment and techniques, the shrimp were either peeled by hand, or sold whole and unpeeled.

In addition to processing problems, development of the East Coast northern shrimp industry has been hampered by radical fluctuations in availability.

In the 1930's, the northern shrimp was abundant in the Gulf of Maine, but by the 1950's, the species had practically disappeared, only to become abundant again in the late 1950's. One speculation is that with little or no fishing pressure, the species becomes over-abundant and susceptible to disease.

Little is known about environmental factors that control the young shrimp's chances of survival to adulthood. Biologists believe the life span is about four years.

During the last year of life, the shrimp, which begins its adult life as a male, changes to female and moves in toward the shore to spawn.