



Profiting from waste

Waterfront firm makes the most from fish byproducts

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NEW BEDFORD -- Ever wonder what happens to the rest of the fish?

When customers buy filets of fish at the market, they rarely think of what happens to the head, backbone, fins and tail. But in New Bedford, where millions of pounds of fish are processed every year in dozens of fish processing plants, what happens to the rest of the fish is a big business expense.

Most fish waste on the waterfront gets ground up into slurry by Delken Company. Fish processors pay Delken several cents a pound to take the fish waste, grind it up and sell it to pet food companies as cat food.

There's another player in the field of fish waste, a company called Advanced Marine Technologies (AMT). The company, which has been in business for years, has begun accepting fish waste and processing it into marketable products. The company turns shark cartilage into nutraceutical pills used by arthritis sufferers and cancer patients, and turns the rest of the fish waste into organic fertilizer.

"We've known for a long time that there was a good market for nutraceuticals," said Lew Spencer of South Dartmouth, Co-Founder & Chairman of AMT. "We only recently figured out how to make something useful out of the rest of the fish."

The fertilizer, marketed under the brand name "Organic Gem", comes in liquid concentrate and is used by large agri-businesses in California and the Midwest. Budweiser hops-growers use Organic Gem to fertilize some of their fields, as does Ocean Spray and several West Coast vineyards.

The nutraceuticals are made up of cartilage from cape shark, skate, dogfish and monkfish. AMT uses a patented enzymatic process to remove the flesh from the cartilage, then dries the cartilage and mills it into a powder. The cartilage powder is then sold to a company in New Jersey that turns it into nutraceutical pills that are used in the treatment of arthritis and cancer.

AMT has carved out a space in a fish processing plant on Hassey Street in the South Terminal waterfront. Accepting fish waste from about five local fish processors, the company could accept much more fish if business warranted.

"We only accept as much raw material as we can sell," said Ira Perry, Director of Operations. "Right now, we're only running one shift, and we're at less than half capacity. But we could probably take all the fish waste on the waterfront if we had the business."

The company is turning its attention to local markets like golf courses and cranberry bogs for its Organic Gem fertilizer. The city of New Bedford recently began accepting free samples of the fertilizer to use on public property.

Organic Gem fertilizer is available locally at CV Variety in Dartmouth, or online at www.amtorganic.com.

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