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Selling Aquaculture Products at Farmers' Markets in Ohio **Laura Tiu, Aquaculture Specialist**

Selling directly to your customer is usually a win-win scenario for farmer and consumer. The farmer typically gets a higher price for their product, along with the opportunity to create product loyalty and the consumer knows who grew it, how it was produced and feels good about stimulating the local economy.

So how do fish farmer and consumer get together? One avenue is at farmers' markets. There has been an increase in the number of consumers wanting to purchase food grown locally. Many farmers' markets have expressed interest in having a seafood vendor, but given the nature of the product, there are some challenges to overcome.

An Ohio fish farmer's aquaculture permit enables the farmer to sell their product live or whole on ice. This approach may work well at farmers' markets where the customers desire a live or whole product. This is particularly true with certain ethnic populations. To sell fish like this, you will need to take into consideration how you will transport the product, keep it alive and how you will "package" it for the customer.

Providing a processed product is a bit trickier. To sell a processed product off the farm in Ohio, that product must be processed, packaged and labeled at a HACCP approved processing facility. There are several such facilities in Ohio that will custom fillet, bread and package your product with your label. After you receive your finished product, you will need to take special care to ensure its quality and safety. This may entail purchasing freezers or refrigerators for your farm market stall.

For assistance with figuring out all of the regulations surrounding selling fish at a farmer's market, it can be helpful to turn to your county Health Department. They can ensure that you have the proper sanitary equipment and permits to sell your product. Each county may have different requirements, so consult the Health Department in each county you plan to sell in.

To find a farmers' market near you or list your own market, check out the following websites.

www.ourohio.org

www.ohiomarketmaker.com

www.localharvest.org