

Kodiak-produced salmon jerky getting more exposure

By Margaret Bauman
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Two enterprising state fisheries research biologists who developed their own wild Alaska salmon jerky, and the manufacturing equipment to produce it, are moving to promote what they've named "Kodiak Solstix" as the snack for the adventurer.

"We think this product is capable of expanding into several different markets — sports enthusiasts, schools, folks in the travel industry who package lunches," said Rob Baer of Alaska Spirit LLC in Kodiak.

"Snacking is only getting larger. Everyone is buying food on the run. We're looking at extreme games, extreme sports. We know the demographic is outdoor-based," he said.

Baer and Mark Witteveen, also a state fisheries research biologist, spent two years developing Kodiak Solstix Wild Salmon Jerky from wild Alaska pink salmon. Now available in spicy pepper and teriyaki flavors — and packed with Omega-3 fatty acids — their products contain no MSG or nitrates and need no refrigeration. Kodiak Solstix can be found on the shelves in some retail stores in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Texas and Colorado, or online at www.wildsalmonjerky.com.

In an effort to achieve the highest possible quality, plus shelf stability, Baer and Witteveen worked closely with the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Fishery Industrial Technology Center to refine their products. Their raw product, pink salmon, is processed in their own facilities in Kodiak. The two used a \$100,000 grant from the Alaska Fisheries Marketing Board to acquire packaging equipment.

"We were able to secure funding to purchase the large-volume packaging machinery to do larger volumes and keep up with the demand," Baer said. "We are looking to do large volumes and then go into larger package sizes."

Baer and Witteveen have signed a deal with Colorado-based Wild River Grilling Co., and another with NFL hall-of-fame legend Larry Csonka, in Alaska, to promote Kodiak Solstix.

According to an Alaska Spirit news release, the Kodiak company has teamed up with Csonka in his "NAPA's North to Alaska" television series on VERSUS network (formerly the Outdoor Life Network). Television commercials to begin airing in January will capitalize on Alaska's beauty, exciting commercial fishing and Csonka's name recognition. Kodiak Solstix will be presented as a convenient, healthy snack alternative for active outdoor people, the company said.

Baer said they also plan to key in on the youth market, on Web sites like myspace.com and youtube.com.

In Fort Collins, Colo., meanwhile, Wild River Grilling owner Bill Gillette is also excited about an agreement to market and distribute the salmon jerky.

Under a relationship with Alaska Spirit, Wild River Grilling will secure product distribution in the Lower 48 at retail outlets, state and national park gift shops, and will handle direct-to-consumer sales fulfillment via their eCommerce Web site.

"We are entering the explosive \$2.7 billion U.S. meat snacks market with a heart-healthy packaged snack food product made from natural, wild-caught, sustainably harvested Alaska salmon," Gillette said.

Promoting wild Alaska salmon products is nothing new for Wild River Grilling. The company recently completed a four-month, 15-city tour that featured gourmet food and wines, and promoted cedar-planked wild Alaska salmon.

In October, Wild River Grilling and the Star of Kodiak Quality Assurance program teamed up for a presentation at the 2006 governor's conference at Keystone, Colo., an event that profiled major tourism and culinary industries surrounding the Continental Divide.

Star of Kodiak took the opportunity to promote the island's salmon industry, partnering with Wild River Grilling to serve 500 guests some of Kodiak's finest coho salmon fillets cooked on Wild River Grilling Cedar Planks.

Wine-infused with a chardonnay from Colorado's Two Rivers Winery, the cedar baking planks were used by the Keystone Resort culinary staff to prepare the fresh salmon feast.

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