

Genuine Maine Lobster with a side of good-for-you Maine Kelp.

All the lobsters that we serve at Linda Bean's Maine Kitchen are fished in Maine by Mainers and are MSC certified. But did you know that we also serve healthy Maine Kelp products?

Kelpislaw™

Kelpislaw™ is made with shredded horsetail kelp, green cabbage, onion, and creamy dressing.

Kelpiwrops™

Kelpiwrops™ are rolled up leaves of sugar kelp filled with smoked Atlantic salmon, cream cheese and a sprig of dill, garnished with capers and lemon zest.

Our kelp specialties from Oceans Approved® in Portland are harvested with the help of Maine lobstermen. Next time you are in Freeport, stop by and give them a try!



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Sea Greens

An ingenious new business provides Maine's lobster crews with a self-kelp manual for their downtime in winter.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

A multi-billion-dollar industry is making a big splash on Maine's shores. "We're going global in the spring," says Tollef K. Olson (pictured right), CEO and founder of Ocean Approved at 188 Presumpscot Street in Portland, an innovative firm that's creating a lucrative market for Maine's kelp beds overnight.

In kelp slaw and bright green salads across the world, particularly. Kelp stars in new-cuisine inventions such as "Mussels over Kelp Noodles, Vegetarian Kelp Noodle Soup, and even Piccalilli/Kelpalilly, served with French bread and hummus," Olson says.

He's trademarked kelp's tag: "the virtuous vegetable."

Getting down to brass tacks, "Kelp is mineral rich and delicious. For example, it has four times as much calcium as whole milk."

Not to mention, "Kelps are a good source of calcium, potassium, magnesium, sodium, copper, iron, and iodine."

And there's no problem making all of this virtuosity desirable, because "it's incredibly tasty. In coastal regions of Asia, up to 10 percent of the average's diner's total food intake can be seaweed. It's a huge component of their diet. It's used in everything from soups to sushi. It crosses the borders of all the food groups."

"In South Korea, pregnant women are highly encouraged by a government program to eat kelp, because it's loaded with trace elements of minerals that the ocean mixes and remixes constantly, not unlike the way the human body mixes them. So kelp is an unmatched source of micro-nutrients. It's very tough to pull these out of a terrestrial plant."



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MADE IN MAINE

Tollef Olson has 20 years' experience in Maine aquaculture, including the renowned Bangs Island Mussels farmed in Casco Bay.



Does that make kelp extra-terrestrial?

"It's subaqueous, at least."

Then there's France. "Every spring, there's a crop, *sacharina lattisima*. It's a seasonal specialty. They actually call it spaghetti *de la mer*, spaghetti of the sea. It's lightly steamed or sautéed with shellfish. Think linguine *vongole*, though that's Italian."

"Worldwide, seaweed harvest volume by weight accounts for 40 percent of all aquaculture products," says Paul Dobbins, Ocean Approved's co-owner with Olson. Fish and shellfish represent the other 60 percent.

"In a good year, there's up to 17 million metric tons of kelp farmed worldwide, with a gate value above \$7 billion," says Olson. "That's just the farmed kelp. The wild kelp puts the figure way over that. It's used in food, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals."

Olson traveled a lot when he was younger. "I've done a lot of commercial fishing. I also ran a restaurant, Vagabonds, in Bar Harbor in the 1980s. In my travels I developed a taste for seaweed salad but found the dried version contained food coloring and preservatives. We have 3,000 miles of coastline, ideal for growing kelp." Eureka. "If we didn't dry it, it would be easier to use, more vibrant, more colorful, and, well, fresh. And it wouldn't need to contain additives or food coloring. Dried and reconstituted, it can't regain its bright color without additives. Our frozen kelp has its own natural color."

His analogy is the pea: "Once you dry a pea, you can't make it green and fresh and sweet again. If you don't dry kelp at first, it becomes virtually a new product," striking, green, and ready to boom.

"So I approached Shep Erhart of Maine Coast Sea Vegetables and the market wasn't ready 30 years ago. I waited. Maine Coast

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Sea Vegetables has excellent dried kelp—they don't reconstitute it or use additives. It's used dried in other recipes. I think we're the only company freezing fresh kelp.

"Today, we have half a dozen boats working from Camp Ellis to Cobscook Bay. We've won sea grants from Maine Technology Institute, a non-profit organization that helps startups. We won a Phase I and Phase II NOAA SBIR (Small Business Innovation

Research) grant (totaling \$395,000) from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. We can, as a result of this, go from microscopic spores all the way to the table with our product. On our five-member board of directors we have an MBA, two former hedge-fund managers, a very successful businessman, and Jason A. Garlock, DMD, who is detailing what properties of kelp really can be substantiated in terms of science—all of whom are excited about this miracle product."

There's another exciting efficiency: "Kelp grows like wildfire in Casco Bay from fall into spring, which is when the lobstermen have already pulled up their traps. Harvesting of kelp...could serve as a great winter job for our lobstermen and fishing community," says Dr. Garlock. Setting up a kelp farm requires an aquaculture license, but off-season fishermen may be employed to harvest kelp for the licensees.

Want to give it a taste? "Browne Trading and Harbor Fish Market both carry our kelp," Olson says.

"Everybody likes wakame in Japanese restaurants, and Flatbread Company has always put it in their salads," says Zack Yates at Harbor Fish. "People make it at home now, too. I find the fresh Maine kelp is actually better and more crunchy—the stuff in sushi places is often the imported, pre-made salad. The tsunami in Japan wiped out a lot of kelp farms, so Maine kelp is in high demand now." ■

Kelp Yourself

Farming kelp may become the perfect winter (off-season) occupation for Maine's lobster fishermen. Kelp requires no food beyond what it filters from the mineral-rich ocean. It grows on long strings that have been seeded with kelp spores before submersion in the ocean. The strings are attached to lines suspended under water some 25 feet below the surface, away from the danger of snagging or fouling the keels or propellers of passing boats. Harvesting begins two months later, when the seedlings have grown to six- to nine-foot ribbons. Kelp, which has no fishy flavor, is hand-cut from the strings, blanched within 24 hours to a bright green, and then cut into fine shreds and linguine- and fettucine-like "noodles," which are then frozen or sold fresh.



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