

## Tribal-caught salmon in the city

Yakama tribal members bring ancient traditions - and fresh salmon - to the Pearl

By Dan Sadowsky

(PORTLAND, OREGON) One of the Northwest's oldest traditions melded with one of its newest last Thursday as tribal fishers added freshly caught wild salmon to the usual bounty of just-picked produce and other local foodstuffs at the Portland Farmers Market.

Standing in the bed of his pickup truck at the edge of the weekly Pearl District event, Tony Washines held out a glimmering, silvery sockeye that caught the attention of several passersby. "Just out of the river!" exclaimed Washines, one of three Yakama tribal families selling that day's catch for \$4 a pound. "Never been on a farm. No dye in this guy."



Yakama longhouse leader Tony Washines greets Portland Farmers Market shoppers from his pickup truck.

His sales pitch resonated with visitors to the four-year-old market, most of whom come to buy fresh, local goods directly from the people who produce them. "This is just as if I went fishing myself," said Walker Leiser, a North Portland resident who planned to grill the sockeye he purchased from Washines on an upcoming camping trip.

Ordinarily, Portlanders have to drive at least 40 miles east of downtown, to Cascade Locks or further along the Columbia River, to purchase wild salmon from tribal fishers. But on Thursday evening, Indian-caught salmon was available for the first time at the Pearl District market, an always-bustling event held from June to September in the Ecotrust parking lot.

Ecotrust, whose programs help support native communities, arranged the sale as a way for tribal members to earn a premium on their catch and to highlight the rich heritage of tribal fishing in Portland's newest neighborhood.

"There's no prior history of tribal sales in the Pearl District," said Elizabeth Woody, Ecotrust's Indigenous Leadership Program Director. "So here we've got the region's oldest residents selling fish to some of its newest residents."

For some of those residents, the novelty of Indian-caught salmon was alluring. "It's so fascinating to see a whole fish," said Peter Beemon of Northwest Portland, who split an 18-pound steelhead with his friend, Yianni Doulis. Doulis added, "And it looks pretty darn fresh."

Indeed, the 75 or so fish for sale at the market were caught just hours before as part of the two-day summer gillnet fishing season on the Mid-Columbia. Ecotrust's Dagmar Carstensen, who helped the fishers along with Elizabeth, hoped tribal members could earn more per

pound selling their catch to market shoppers than to processors or to riverfront salmon-shoppers.

That was the case for Washines, who sold Wednesday's catch to a local processor for \$2 a pound. On Thursday, he sold about 100 pounds of fish to marketgoers for twice the price. "I would have been able to sell them elsewhere," he said, "but not for nearly as much as what I could get here." Washines also spoke to a Pearl District restaurateur, who inquired about regular deliveries.

All told, the Yakama fishers sold about 465 pounds of steelhead, sockeye, and summer chinook, also known as June hogs. Such "over-the-bank" sales to the public help tribal fishers support their families and make it possible for them to continue their traditional livelihood.

But the market for salmon isn't what it used to be, recalled Inez Kuneki, a 50-year-old Yakama tribal member who sold 15 steelhead, sockeye and chinook that she and her sons, Paul and Joe, caught that morning using a dozen gill nets near the Hood River Bridge.

Kuneki, whose father taught her to fish at age four, recalled the 1960s and 1970s when Indian nets seemed to stretch endlessly from Cascade Locks to John Day, and salmon sold for today's equivalent of \$10 a pound. Then came the time, said tribal fisherman James Goudy, when getting 50 cents a pound for your catch "felt like you were getting a lot."

Although the market has rebounded somewhat, Kuneki said she's "afraid we're losing our tradition of fishing." It is a tradition that goes back hundreds of years, part of a culture and a diet deeply anchored in the ecology of the Pacific Northwest. Kuneki recites the food her grandmother says represented Mother Earth: deer, elk and salmon, strawberries and huckleberries, and edible roots with names like piaxi, sowitk and punku.

Fish buyers said along with the other benefits of buying fresh-caught wild salmon, they liked knowing their purchase helps maintain a centuries-old tradition. Tribal fishers said exposing their catch to Pearl District marketgoers and other new audiences is one way to keep that tradition alive.