Freeze-Drying May Lead to Salmon In Space

Tuesday, 16 August 2011

{audio}/images/stories/mp3/110816.space_fish_package.mp3{/audio}

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

In the near future, astronauts could be treated to the delicacy of Alaska wild salmon; even as they orbit high above the ocean the fish came from.

Alexandra Oliveira and Brian Himelbloom, associate professors at the University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences, and a team of researchers have been studying the potential of freeze-dried sockeye salmon as astronaut food using funding from the University of Alaska's Space Grant Program.

Himelbloom said freeze-drying food is common because it extends the shelf life of a product while retaining nutritional value. Unlike conventional drying, freeze-drying involves lowering both the pressure and the temperature so the structure of the product remains intact.

-- (Space Fish 1: :19 sec "So what we thought would ... freeze-dried fish.")

While the funding intended for the freeze-dried salmon to be out of this world, Oliveira said it has very worldly potential in the consumer marketplace.

-- (Space Fish 2: :15 sec "Camping food ...for the military program.")

She said salmon wasn't chosen for research solely on its availability in Alaska waters, but by the fact that it is so nutritious.

-- (Space Fish 3: :49 sec "And it provides very ... meets all these standards.")

The research has also attracted the attention of the Department of Defense.

-- (Space Fish 4: :34 sec "So the department of defense ... rigorous test.")

Both Oliveira and Himelbloom feel confident that the fish will pass the testing. They plan to continue their own research on the shelf life of the freeze-dried fish and conduct consumer taste testing here in Kodiak and at the university in Fairbanks.

Oliveira hopes that someday freeze-dried salmon could become a common product in grocery stores as a salad topper, baby food, instant soup and other snack items.

###