Fish Tech Center Funding Threatened

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

It makes sense - especially in Alaska - that scientists would want to research how to utilize the fish parts most consumers have no taste for. Kodiak's Fishery Industrial Technology Center specializes in making the most of fish waste. But now the program, a joint effort between the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the United Stated Department of Agriculture, is threatened by federal budget cuts.

FITC researcher Peter Bechtel:

-- (Fish 1 15 sec "The big picture is that in Alaska we have over 2 million metric tons of fish that are processed every year. It's all processed for human food. Then you have left things like heads, frames, tails, livers and things like that. And the question is ‘What can you do with these?'")

Aside from making a flavorful soup, researchers have learned that utilizing fish by-product in new ways can create goods that many of us use in our daily lives.

-- (Fish 2 22sec "The one that you're going to see in the stores everywhere is fish oil. Another thing that is going on are gelatins. Right now in Alaska for the first time ever we're starting to take some of the skin, as it turns out pollock skin, and we're starting to make fish gelatin. A gelatin just like Knox gelatin from cow skin. We're making gelatin from fish skin.")

FITC's research works to find innovative and sustainable solutions for fishing agriculture. The program, however, is threatened by a loss of funding from a Congress that is struggling to find similar solutions for the federal budget. Fear that funding would be decreased or cut altogether has been latent since early this summer. As Congress now looks to trim $1.5 trillion from the federal budget over the next ten years, likely cuts to the USDA's budget will impact projects that fall under discretionary spending, such as the FITC. Also at risk are nine other Department of Agriculture research centers across the country.

Carol Lewis is UAF's Dean of the school of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. According to a report from KUAC news in Fairbanks, Lewis says that if USDA funding does not come through, not all research will be interrupted. Some funding has been secured to continue the program for up to one year.

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