New ASMI International Program Director Promoted from Within

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Alexa Tonkovich was named ASMI's International Program Director.

Jay Barrett/KMXT

The Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute has a new director for its international marketing efforts. Alexa Tonkovich, who has worked the past four years as ASMI’s Asia and Emerging Markets manager, was named to the post Monday morning, and took over the job immediately. Her promotion will now add Europe to her plate.

“It’ll be a bit of a challenge. I have done some work in Europe. I’ve been to the European seafood show and I’ve done trade missions in Portugal and things like that. But I’ll still have to get up to speed a bit on the European market. And now I’ll need to learn a bit more about that," she said. "Asia and the emerging markets, of course they’re challenging markets, but I feel like I have a pretty good handle on them. I think the biggest challenge will probably be finding the right staff to replace me and then training new staff is always a challenge.”

Promoting the sustainability of Alaska Seafood in European markets will be just one of the challenges she envisions in her new position.

“Well, sustainability is kinda at the forefront right now at least most especially in Europe. And getting across our sustainability message and keeping good consistent messaging on that in the face of a lot of pressure to go with other certification schemes. Other challenges are kind of just the usual ones: there’s a lot of competition. We have a lot of well-funded competition, certainly in other markets. Our price is sometimes higher so we often have to work a little bit harder to prove the wild, natural, sustainable attributes that set our products apart from the competition.”

Tonkovich said that Europe is fonder of the Marine Stewardship Council, or MSC’s, stamp of approval for seafood, and overcoming that will be another of her main challenges.

“It really varies by market. Say a market like Japan where they’re very familiar with our product and NGOs don’t have quite as great of influence there yet, they seem pretty happy with … they feel fairly

confident that they understand how sustainable Alaska seafood is and they accept our certification scheme as comparable to the MSC. In Europe, it’s a bit more of a challenge, but I know we have a good sustainablitity story to tell and I do know our certification scheme is comparable, or above. So I think we just have to continue to get that message out there, and eventually it will stick.”

Tonkovich replaces Joe Jacobson as international marketing director. She’ll be based in the organization’s Juneau headquarters.

ASMI Executive Director Mike Cerne said Tonkovich was selected from a pool of strong applicants, and he expressed confidence that she will be outstanding in her new role.