

Kings County News July 9, 2012

Salmon Wars are here

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After the pointed documentary *Salmon Wars* screened at the Al Whittle Theatre recently, an audience member said, "I knew there was a reason I didn't eat salmon. It's disgusting."

Farmed salmon, at any rate, is gross. I went home and threw the chunk in my fridge into the green bin. My husband thought I was nuts until he downloaded the film - which is free - and watched it.

Here's what we learned from *Salmon Wars*: fishmeal fed to "feedlot" salmon is more contaminated with dioxins than any other livestock feed, according to a European Union study.

Farmed salmon are raised in open cages: thousands of fish in a pen the size of a small home. Generally, a dozen pens are tethered together. Often antibiotics or poisons to treat sea lice are added to the water.

The fish pass their feces right onto the ocean bottom and the sludge spreads, contaminating the water with as much raw sewage as a town of 65,000. Farmed salmon have their flesh dyed pink; without dye their meat would be a pale gray.

Salmon are carnivores. It takes over two million tonnes of small fish to produce 871,200 tons of farmed salmon. That's not sustainable.

Cooke Aquaculture from New Brunswick dominates salmon farming in this province and the whole industry is controlled by a short list of global corporations.

Wise, old journalist Silver Donald Cameron and filmmaker Chris Beckett showed yucky footage of sea lice-infected salmon, crowded pens, and filthy harbour bottoms. It is no surprise Cooke Aquaculture refused to take part in the film.

No wonder lobster fishermen are beside themselves and audiences at the live screenings in Halifax, Jordan Bay, Freeport, Port Mouton and Wolfville seemed to side with them.

Salmon Wars also demonstrated there are alternatives to open pen salmon aquaculture, including closed tanks in water and on land. Closed tanks are already being used in Hants County.

The big question Cameron posed is "why is the Dexter government so committed to a questionable industry?"

Where is the transparency and accountability that we have a right to expect from any government? Ottawa we might as well give up on.

Salmon Wars suggests government doesn't enforce regulations that might prevent pollution or pesticide use. There is even a clip of then-opposition leader Darrell Dexter decrying farmed fish. What changed his mind?

Last week, Cooke got permission to put two new fish farming sites in Jordan Bay, Shelburne County. Folks in that lobster fishing community are upset with Ottawa's approval of the plan and Transport Canada's claim the sites are not likely to cause adverse environmental effects.

This province recently announced it was going to invest \$25 million in loans and forgivable loans to help Cooke Aquaculture expand its operations at three locations in Shelburne, Digby and Truro.

Meanwhile this firm, which boasts a 54 per cent profit margin, had to kill hundreds of thousands of salmon in recent months because of an outbreak of infectious salmon anemia in pens outside Shelburne Harbour.

Would pig farmers be allowed to dump their effluent into the Bay of Fundy? It would appear that, if you called it aquaculture, that practice would be just fine. A viewer at the screening, who used to live in British Columbia, spoke about the lack of awareness of this issue in Nova Scotia. B.C. consumers demand to know where their fish come from.

Now there is an alternative. Off the Hook, Atlantic Canada's first community supported fishery, is willing to deliver to this area. They focus on line-caught ground fish. Co-op organizers say they have chosen processors who will guarantee top quality and a targeted window of 24 hours from the ocean to the consumer.

Each bag of fresh fillets will be labeled with the date landed and the name of the person who caught the fish. Imagine the accountability consumers can now find when making a fish purchase. Educating consumers may be the only way to bring about change.