

USDA to Buy Up to \$13M in Canned Pink Salmon

Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — The U.S. Department of Agriculture has agreed to buy up to \$13 million in canned pink salmon to ease a glut that has weighed down prices for Alaska fishermen.

In July, Gov. Sean Parnell asked the USDA to buy \$37 million worth of canned fish under a federal law that allows the government to purchase surplus food from farmers and donate it to food banks or other programs.

Earlier this year, the agency purchased \$20 million worth of canned salmon.

U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski announced the USDA's plans Wednesday. Her focus wasn't on a specific dollar amount but on the government considering using existing funds to take excess salmon off warehouse shelves and provide a nutritious food to Americans in need.

While the government is only buying a portion of what the governor requested, it's still significant, said Bruce Schactler, food aid program coordinator for the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. He estimated it at well over 300,000 cases, which will help the industry and provide stock to food banks.

Schactler said Wednesday that the purchase won't wipe out the glut, but Parnell's request would not have done it either. There was enough canned product at the end of 2013 to last for three years, he said.

The 2013 pink salmon harvest set a record, with 226 million fish brought in. The previous high was 161 million.

Pinks follow a two-year cycle of abundance — 2014 was expected to be a weaker year, meaning next year could be another bumper year. Fishermen are concerned about the impact on prices if there is another big harvest while a huge canned inventory remains on the market.

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