

Starting young with a love of healthy fish

May 26 2014, by Christina Williams



"Who's had salmon before?" Portland State community health researcher Betty Izumi asks her small and wiggly audience.

One toddler arm is raised, another is tentative, a third looks at his toes.

"Who knows where [salmon](#) comes from?" Izumi poses.

"Laska!" comes the confident reply.

The 3-year-old student at PSU's Helen Gordon Child Development Center is a well-informed pioneer. She and her classmates are the first to be studying salmon in a curriculum for pre-schoolers developed by Izumi's Harvest for Healthy Kids program.

Through pictures, and hands-on activities involving salmon skin (proclaimed: oily!) and salmon eggs (tiny but very sticky!), a salmon costume (funny!) and even a taste of smoked salmon (yummy!), the curriculum is designed to instill an interest and appreciation for salmon among pre-schoolers in the hopes that they will bring this enthusiasm home and share it with their parents.

Harvest for Healthy Kids began as a partnership led by Izumi between PSU and Mt. Hood Community College's Head Start program to expose young children to healthy foods. The Helen Gordon Child Development Center provided a handy place to test the new curriculum and fit in with the center's focus on healthy foods.



"The HG CDC nutrition program strives to cultivate an appreciation for food and where it comes from while providing opportunities for children to become engaged with cooking and food," said Ellie Justice HG CDC's Director. "We are delighted to begin a new partnership that aligns so

well with these goals."

The salmon unit tested at Helen Gordon Center culminated with a [sockeye salmon](#) lunch prepared by the school's cook Deb Sesnsenbach who brought the salmon from the fridge to show the students in the classroom.

The salmon, in addition to some of the educational props, came from Iliamna Fish Company, a Portland-based community-supported fishery that fishes for salmon in Alaska's Bristol Bay every summer.

Iliamna isn't the only Alaska connection. Izumi, who's done research in the 49th state, developed the salmon unit in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Center for Alaska Native Health Research as part of a program called Fish to Schools.

"The goal of the Fish to Schools project is to connect Native and independently owned and operated fish businesses with K-12 schools in Alaska," Izumi said. "The salmon unit builds on the success we've had with Harvest for Healthy Kids, which until now, has focused on promoting fruit and vegetable intake through in-class education, foodservice modifications, and family engagement."



The salmon unit will be deployed in Alaska this fall and materials will be publicly available on the Harvest for Healthy Kids website for free at www.harvestforhealthykids.org.

Izumi would also like to see salmon included in preschool curricula and meals across Oregon, including the Helen Gordon Center, where her own daughter attends class and enjoys the creative food program.

"Deb does so much more than cook food for the kids. She works hard to help kids make connections between the food and where it comes from," Izumi says.

Provided by Portland State University

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