

'Yes, we can' eat Asian carp, chef says



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Oct. 27 -- ALTON -- Tasting is believing when it comes to realizing Asian carp as a delicacy and an economy boost.

"I broke the code of this fish," French chef Philippe Parola said Tuesday at the dedication ceremony for the Jerry F. Costello National Great Rivers Research and Education Center Confluence Field Station. "It took a chef to break the code of this fish."

Parola said taxpayers' money is being wasted in science studying the Asian carp invasion problem, when taxpayers could be saving by eating this clean, good fish.

"Yes, we can," exclaimed Parola, who lives in New Orleans, is president and CEO of Chef Parola Enterprises, stars in his own television series, and has his own culinary school and accessory line.

The fish, as prepared by Parola -- which simply consists of breading and frying, pan-frying in butter or poaching -- gives absolutely no "fishy" taste. The taste is mild and clean. The filets are bright white.

Parola's breaded patties taste like a crab cake. In a blind taste test, it seemingly would be a close call as to which one is the crab cake.

The benefits of maximizing Asian carp for the U.S. market are many, said Parola, who already produces his products in Louisiana, where the state government embraces his "Asian Carp Invasion Solution."

Parola said having a domestic market for the fish versus an export would create a lasting, ongoing, stable process that will help regulate the nationwide Asian carp population crisis. Asian carp are an invasive species that feed on plankton, which is food for Illinois native and smaller fish. But because Asian carp eat plankton, they have little or no mercury content.

He also said creating the U.S. market would put Americans to work by creating full- and part-time jobs. In Grafton, a group called Grafton Summit Enterprises LLC plans to build a fish processing plant. Grafton Summit Enterprises member, resident and Grafton businessman Oliver Ready said it would put 60 people to work and put 10 more boats on the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

"Now, we have to raise the funding," said Ready, of Ready's Fish Market, who has been in the fish industry for 43 years. "It would put 80 people to work right away."

Grafton Summit Enterprises also includes Parola, Grafton city attorney and businessman Ben Allen, Grafton resident and international businessman Gray Magee, construction and food code expert Bryan LeBeau, and Roger Crone, who has an extensive background in production line knowledge and maintenance.

Parola said a domestic market also would boost the River Bend's economy. It would give U.S. consumers a domestic, clean, healthy, wild-caught and affordable fish to eat.

"China wants 30 million pounds per year of only our Asian carp bighead species to sell to 2 percent of their millionaires and rich people, because they don't want to eat their own polluted fish," Parola said. "Yet, we are bringing in hundreds of millions of pounds of dirty fish from China and Vietnam. I say, 'Put America to work.'"

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He said his solution would increase the tax base by creating multiple levels of taxes payable to local, state and federal governments via income/business taxes paid by fishermen, processors, brokers, retail food chains, etc.

"This is not just a Great Lakes problem; it's an inland problem," Parola said.

Grafton Summit Enterprises named its venture Inland Fisheries.

Ready came up with the word inland for the title.

"We were sitting around, brainstorming, and I said, 'Let's call it inland,'" he said. "That covers everything."

Visit www.chefphilippe.com for more information or e-mail graymageejr@gmail.com to contact Grafton Summit Enterprises.

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