China loves Maine lobsters

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By HONG XIAO in Rockport, Maine |   
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Tom Adams started his lobster wholesale company in 2011, with an eye toward the international market. That strategy has paid off.  
Adams’ company, Maine Coast, has grown 125 percent over the past three years. Last year, the company shipped more than 7 million pounds of live lobster to 29 different countries, including China, with revenue of $57 million.  
“It (China) is our biggest and fastest-growing single country of export that we do,” Adams told China Daily at Maine International Trade Day on May 18 in Rockport. “Chinese consumers have had an incredible role in our history at Maine Coast.”  
Adams is founder and CEO of the company headquartered in York, Maine. The plant has a holding capacity of 180,000 pounds of live lobster and employs 50 people.  
Main Coast has been exporting to China since 2013, and has customers in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Other cities such as Hangzhou and Chongqing are showing interest in Maine lobsters, he said.  
“In 2013, we were only doing around $1 million in revenue in our first year there. Last year alone in Asia, we did over $35 million,” he said, adding that China is the majority of the sales at more than $24 million.  
“We’re incredibly excited about the business we’ve done, and the potential growth going forward,” said Adams. “It’s just an incredible product; it’s a healthy, clean, sustainable industry. It’s really got no other competition in the world from the standpoint of flavor and sweetness and succulence,” he said.  
Adams said typically it’s probably a five-day process from the time the lobsters are harvested from the ocean to the tables, hotels, buffets and supermarkets in Asia.  
To get a live, perishable product from the East Coast of the United States to China in a timely fashion can be a logistical challenge.  
“The big challenge is sometimes finding cold chain technology and refrigerated trucks from the airport in Beijing or Shanghai to an outlying city. So that’s probably our biggest challenge with expanding our geographical region that we export lobsters to in China,” he said.  
China Daily also spoke to Annie Tselikis, executive director of the Maine Lobster Dealers Association.  
“It (China) is a rapidly growing market and a very important one for our businesses,” she said.  
“Chinese consumers are really looking for healthy and sustainable products, and Maine’s lobster supply has increased over the course of the last 10 to 15 years. So it’s been a very strategic market for our businesses to be developing.”  
Tselikis said that “in 2006, our lobster exports from the United States to China were $719,000. In 2017, the value of that trade had increased to $126.8 million”.  
The lobster businesses that operate in the supply chain contribute about $1 billion to Maine’s economy every year.  
“And that’s above and beyond what happens on the water,” Tselikis said. “The value of the fisheriers is roughly $500 million, but just the activity in the supply chain alone, the buying and selling and processing of lobster, contributes greatly to Maine’s economy.”

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