



JIM MCLAUGHLIN FLORIDA WEEKLY

Vincent Jenkins and Mark Newton talk about the falling price of shrimp.

a pound with heads off. (Those are estimates based on what the market has from time-to-time, and on what Henry Gore and other shrimpers say. Henderson is reluctant to talk figures, he says, because people don't understand what's involved in beheading shrimp, when a third of the weight is lost, or how much prices depend on the season and the kind.)

And at a supermarket where fresh, wild-caught U.S. shrimp are displayed in a fish case — say, the pink Key West shrimp, or the brown Texas shrimp — prices for the large can run from roughly \$12 or \$14 up to about \$18 or \$20 a pound, depending on the market and the moment, or whether the shrimp are sold headless, and on how large they are.

(In a Lee County Publix this week,

pink Gulf shrimp, wild caught and about 18 per pound, were \$13.99, while Thai white shrimp, farm-raised, at 33 per pound, were \$5.99, and Thai whites, at 25 a pound, were \$10.99 per pound.)

Back from the sea

To run through those price points and the American market, first the shrimp travel out of the boat's hold and up a conveyor belt in bags about the size of a hay bale, roughly 40 pounds.

They're rock solid at this point, but still fresh — a fact made possible by new refrigeration technology that can turn shrimp not 10 minutes out of the warm Gulf waters into frozen blocks that remain at 40 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit, in a boat's hold.



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Trico Supervisor Jano Costello (rear) checks the scale as Marcos Galindo loads another bag onto the pallet for shipment.

Thus, there are no more ice boats in the fleet, and no more ice slopped in the holds of the boats.

The bags move across the narrow boardwalk abutting the boat, and straight into the packinghouse. There, they're snatched off the conveyor belt, weighed and stacked on pallets before being run out the door on forklifts to refrigerated trucks bound for the distributors.

Shrimp captains will be paid on the spot, based on the total weight and kind of their catch, and if they captained their own boat like Gore, they'll get a crew share, too — they'll split about 30 percent of the income with the crew (usually two men).

Some shrimp, however, are carried

aside, to be put into "piles," the word used by shrimpers to describe any catch, however large, and prepared by men and women working next door at Gulf Shrimp.

The best of those workers can snap a head off a shrimp in each hand every second for as long as necessary, an hour maybe, so that some shrimp can be sold headless.

At home, meanwhile, a fisherman like Gore has to repair his boat or equipment. On this trip he developed an oil leak, and he just spent \$1,100 in the net shop patching a couple of holes in a net that already has holes about the size of a large dinner platter built in, so that sea turtles can escape (shrimpers estimate that costs them about 10 percent of the catch).

And then he gets to see his wife, Tracey Gore, and his children.

"I try to be there for birthdays and holidays like Halloween and Thanksgiving and Christmas and Easter," he says.

And then he isn't there, again, and the whole process is repeated, with trips ranging from a week or 10 days to a month.

And the hardest part of all that, Gore says, is the moment of departure.

"Leaving the dock is hardest for me, leaving my family, and my daughter, who's only 8.

"Once you get out there, you get into catching shrimp and taking care of the boat and talking on the radio, you sort of get involved — it's not as bad.

"But leaving that dock is murder. I know some guys who would get physically sick. And they're out of it now, they quit."

Yet, Gore will be back out again before the week's out, he says.

And nobody will be reading the words of Robert Louis Stevenson over him quite yet: "Home is the hunter, home from the hill, and the sailor home from the sea." ■

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