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Whole Foods Market Stops Selling Live Lobsters

AUSTIN, Texas (June 16, 2006). After evaluating the entire supply chain process, Whole Foods Market® (NASDAQ: WFMI) announced today it will stop selling live lobsters effective immediately.

"Although we discovered significant improvements are possible from capture up to in-store tank conditions, we are not yet sufficiently satisfied that the process of selling live lobsters is in line with our commitment to humane treatment and quality of life for animals," said Margaret Wittenberg, vice president of quality standards for Whole Foods Market. "At this time, we believe it is too difficult to maintain consistent conditions throughout the entire supply chain to ensure the health and wellbeing of lobsters outside their natural environment for such a long period of time. Many lobsters are held in storage facilities for several months."

For the time being, the Company will only sell frozen raw and cooked lobster products from suppliers meeting specific quality standards for humane treatment, handling and processing.

"If at some time in the future we become convinced that sufficient improvements are possible in the handling of live lobsters to ensure humane treatment throughout the supply chain, we will consider resuming the sale of live lobsters at Whole Foods Market," Wittenberg said.

In November 2005, Whole Foods Market assembled an internal task force to review every step of its live lobster procurement process in an effort to improve humane conditions. A deadline of June 15, 2006 was set to determine if more humane alternatives could be implemented. Evaluating the biology, natural environment, behaviors and needs of the animals, the team assessed every angle from traps and transport to in-store tank design and take-home cooking instructions.

"We place as much emphasis on the importance of humane treatment and quality of life for all animals as we do on the expectations for quality and flavor. It is an integral component of our standards for every species we sell, and lobster cannot be any different," said John Mackey, co-founder and CEO of Whole Foods Market. "Part of our business is to continually learn and evolve, and while the door is open to new information, we are satisfied with our decision to stop selling live lobsters at this time."

The Company partnered with an innovative seafood company, Clearwater Seafoods of Nova Scotia, Canada, to experiment with different handling techniques that support natural conditions to help lobsters thrive. Since lobsters are typically solitary creatures, the team developed alternatives including single-layer holding crates on the boats, individual holding compartments during storage, and unique "condos" for in-store tanks. Whole Foods Market further looked into the biology and sentience in lobsters, including studying the final report of the November 2005 European Food Safety Authority Animal Health and Welfare panel which concluded all decapod crustaceans, including lobsters and crabs, are complex in behavior and appear to have some degree of awareness, feeling pain and having the ability to learn.

Whole Foods Market will sell select raw and cooked frozen lobster products solely from companies that meet the strict handling and processing standards developed during the Company's evaluation period, which includes measuring to ensure the quality and health of the animal. Currently only Clearwater Seafoods meets the criteria.

"We are pleased to find high quality frozen lobster products from a vendor partner who places as much value on sustainability and respect for the well-being of the lobsters as we do," said David Pilat, national seafood coordinator for Whole Foods Market. "We believe our shoppers who enjoy lobster will find these frozen lobster products offer the same delicious flavor and the myriad of culinary options of fresh lobster but with much more ease of preparation." To be consistent with its decision to not sell live lobsters, the Company will also stop selling live soft shell crabs effective immediately.

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