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Dr. Cornel Ceapa, owner of Acadian Sturgeon and Caviar Inc., displays a pool of young sturgeon in his hatchery at Carters Point on the Kingston Peninsula near Saint John.

## Scientist turns international businessman with Saint John-area sturgeon operation

**MICHELLE PORTER**  
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

**SAINT JOHN** - A worldwide drop in caviar supply and a passion to protect a threatened prehistoric fish have combined to turn a New Brunswick-

based scientist into a businessman.

On Tuesday, Acadian Sturgeon and Caviar Inc. will fill an order from the German-based Society to Save the Sturgeon for 1,000 juvenile Atlantic sturgeon, an order with a current value in the range of \$10,000.

The fish are destined for rivers that flow into Europe's Baltic Sea, where the species was populous almost a thousand years ago, as part of a last-ditch effort to save the Baltic 'Atlantic'

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# Sturgeon farm will double as gene bank to preserve stock

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sturgeon from extinction.

"There is no other place in the world where they can get them," said Dr. Cornel Ceapa, owner of Acadian Sturgeon and Caviar, who moved with his family to New Brunswick three years ago in order to study the Atlantic sturgeon, a fish that has been swimming in Earth's waters for millions of years.

There are three things that make the fish, which Ceapa describes as "the most fascinating in the world", valuable: the Atlantic sturgeon swimming in the Saint John River are "100-per-cent compatible with the old European species"; the populations are in comparatively good shape; and it is the only place in the world where a brood stock can still be obtained through commercial fishing.

Combined, the above factors have generated a small, but very specific, market that Ceapa hopes to exploit – a market for stocking material (larvae, eggs and juveniles), meat and caviar.

Currently, the company, which was incorporated in 2004, captures brood stock and sells the stocking-material to aquaculture operations and organization concerned with Atlantic sturgeon populations in the United States, South America and across Europe. Juveniles hatched at Carters Point on the Kingston Peninsula near Saint John, were sold to restock rivers in Poland.

But the biggest demand today isn't for stocking materials, its for caviar, a delicacy that is getting as expensive as the sturgeon is scarce in waters around the world.

"The supply of caviar in all the world dropped dramatically because of a drop in [sturgeon] populations," said Ceapa.

Previously, most caviar was taken from sturgeon caught in the Caspian Sea. But in 2005, in recognition of the near-extinction populations, there was a ban on all legal exports of the sturgeon eggs from this area, creating a gaping hole in the market.

This year, Ceapa plans put his business in a position to fill this gap. This

year he plans to build a land-based facility to house a farm, using commercially-caught Atlantic sturgeon. He has obtained a special licence to catch the other sturgeon species in the Saint John River, the short-nose sturgeon. This will put him in the position to put caviar on the market, a delicacy that can easily retail for \$70 an ounce.

Unlike other caviar farms, he said he aims to continue to find markets for all sturgeon products, not just caviar – meat and stocking material included.

And – more importantly to the scientist in the businessman – his farm will double as a gene bank for the struggling species. "Keeping a brood stock is insurance for the river," he said. "If an accident were to happen, there would still be gene bank that could be used to repopulate the river again."

Ceapa called the business a difficult one. Not only does the owner need to understand a lot about the complex fish, but the late maturation of the fish means that an investor may have to wait a long time for a return on an investment.

As an example, he cited a short-nose sturgeon farm in New Brunswick that was established eight years ago. "They finally managed to get their first caviar just this year," he said.

But, he added, caviar sales were in the \$3-million range.



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