

Prairie farmers try commercial fishing



Palmer Svaren, top, and Dennis Stamnes reset nets after removing the catch.

OUTLOOK, Sask. — Prairie folklore is filled with references to dust, grasshoppers, hail, drought and buffalo bones turning white under the hot sun.

But when the final book is written a few pages may have to be reserved for the hardy prairie fishermen who launched their boats to reap the harvest of the murky depths.

For the second year, Lake Diefenbaker, a huge body of water backed up behind the Gardiner Dam on the South Saskatchewan River, has been opened to commercial fishing. Most of the seven fishing boats plying the lake are manned by area farmers.

There is a quota of 90,719 kg (200,000 pounds) of whitefish for the season which lasts from early October until bad weather forces the boats to beach for winter — usually about mid-November. In 1978, only 74,359 kg (164,000 pounds) were taken from the lake because of abnormally late spawning and bad weather.

About 25% of the catch is sold locally while the balance is marketed through the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC), the crown corporation responsible for marketing all fish caught commercially in the prairie provinces and most of the Northwest Territories.

Because of its high quality, most of the whitefish caught in Lake Diefenbaker is sold in the United States, said Larry Hunter, FFMC Saskatchewan zone manager.