

Deep seawater business booming in Hawaii

HONOLULU -- State exports of desalinated deep seawater soared 700 percent during the first three months of this year to \$8.8 million, topping chocolate and coffee as Hawaii's biggest food-related export.

That is nearly half the total exports of all of last year, with \$16.8 million worth of seawater shipped out of Hawaii at the wholesale level.

The seawater is being marketed as healthy, pure, mineral-rich drinking water, and is popular in Japan.

The water being exported is even more impressive considering the industry was launched just three years ago.

"If it's not already, it will be our biggest export," said Steve Bretschneider, of Deep SeaWater International Inc., which plans to begin bottling seawater this summer. "It's really just beginning."

The water is collected from a depth of 3,000 feet (900 meters) off Kailua-Kona at the state Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority, commonly known as NELHA.

Koyo USA Corp. is the state's first and largest bottler of deep seawater, producing about 250,000 1.5-liter bottles a day for export to Japan.

The company expects to open a third plant at the energy laboratory this summer, quadrupling production to 1 million bottles a day.

The other companies in operation are Enzamin USA Inc. and Hawaii Deep Marine Inc.

Savers Holdings Ltd., Hawaii Deep Ocean Waters and Kamaaina Waters LLC also have plans to eventually begin bottling at the lab.

Another company, DSH International Inc., plans to pump seawater into a boat off Oahu and sell it to bottlers in Kapolei.

Ron Baird, NELHA's chief executive, said seawater bottlers employ more than 100 people and have spent more than \$100 million in capital improvements.

"It helps diversify the economy," he said. "These jobs are not dependent on the larger national economy. I think that's critical for the state." (AP)

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