

RED TIDE OUTBREAK: Sand dollars: You may soon be shelling out more clams for clams

By DENNIS TATZ
The Patriot Ledger

Clam lovers may soon have to dig deeper into the bellies of their wallets.

Restaurant owners say they are trying to avoid raising prices, but the latest red tide outbreak is already causing the wholesale price of clams to increase and retail prices may soon follow.

Roy Kandalraft, owner of Tony's Clam Shop on Wollaston Beach in Quincy, said the cost of clams has gone from \$65 a gallon 10 days ago to about \$82 a gallon today.

So far, Kandalraft, who gets his shellfish from Maine and Cape Cod, said he has no plans to pass the increase to customers.

"The availability (of shellfish) is still very good. (But) already people are calling and asking if it's OK to eat the clams," Kandalraft said.

Shellfish beds have been closed for the two weeks along North Shore and Buzzards Bay because heavy runoff from the recent eight-day deluge carried contaminants into the ocean. The red tide outbreak has since moved as far south as the Marshfield-Duxbury border, where shellfish beds were closed on Friday.

The state Division of Marine Fisheries told officials in Hull, Cohasset, Scituate, Marshfield and Duxbury that there was a ban on digging or harvesting shellfish in their communities.

Jim O'Brien, owner of Jake's Seafood in Hull, said he would probably wait a week or two before deciding if the increased price of shellfish will force him to pass on the cost to customers.

O'Brien, who buys clams from northern Maine, said he has loyal customers who have faith in the shellfish he serves.

"I'm sure there will be some people who will be concerned if it (red tide) progresses," O'Brien said.

Marc Caradonna, manager at Barefoot Bob's in Hull, said he anticipates no increase in what he charges for shellfish unless the red tide causes the supply to diminish.

"The threats are there," Caradonna said. "We haven't seen anything yet."

Todd Schwanke, owner of the Clam Box on Wollaston Beach, said the shellfish bed closings have yet to have an effect on his business or forced him to raise prices.

"We will always have clams," said Schwanke, who gets shellfish from Cape Cod.

Schwanke, who got clams from Maine and Maryland during the red tide scare last year, said recent poor weather has hurt business more than anything.

Patrons at the restaurants yesterday were ambivalent about whether price increases would cause them to abstain from eating shellfish.

John Lewis, 48, of Quincy, who has been going to Tony's Clam Shop for five years, said a price increase will not change his eating habits. "Everything is going up," Lewis said. "It's just a part of life."

This year's red tide outbreak is less severe than last year's, said Kandalaft, owner of Tony's in Wollaston.

When red tide closed shellfish beds from New Hampshire to Martha's Vineyard last summer, Kandalaft decided to display a sign to assure customers that all of his seafood was harvested from federal and state approved fishing beds and was only bought from licensed dealers.

He is hoping this year's red tide outbreak does not force him to dust off his sign.

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