Irish Moss Harvest

Irish Moss is a small perennial seaweed that grows best in water that is between the low tide mark and a depth of 30 feet.

Irish Moss Interpretive Centre

There are two ways to harvest Irish Moss. The first and main fishery requires a license and is done from a fishing boat in the shallow water just offshore.

Community Museums Association of PEI

This harvest utilizes the same type of boat that is used in countless other Island fisheries including lobster, tuna and groundfish.

Community Museums Association of PEI

The method of harvesting from a boat is really a simple procedure. A small fishing vessel hauling upwards of six drags of varying sizes moves slowly and continually around the shallow water where the moss grows.

Irish Moss Interpretive Centre
Any moss that may be loose or disengaged from the rocks is picked up by rakes. When the rakes are full, they are raised to the boat using a hauler and a series of pulleys and booms and the moss is emptied onto the floor of the boat. 

*Irish Moss Interpretive Centre*

A special hoist on the wharf is used to empty the boat. The fishermen shovel the moss into a container that is raised using the hoist and dumped into a truck.

*Community Museums Association of PEI*

The other method of taking moss from the water is as unique as the people who do it. After a storm with high winds washes moss into the more shallow areas the gathering of moss can begin.

*Irish Moss Interpretive Centre*

Moss that is washed up into the very shallow areas is gathered using small hand-held nets or long hand rakes.

*Irish Moss Interpretive Centre*
The slightly deeper areas of the shore require horses to collect the moss.

*Community Museums Association of PEI*

This operation works in much the same way as plowing a field, except in the case of moss, the person guides the horse from the animal's back.

*Community Museums Association of PEI*

The horse is harnessed to the basket that they will drag and pass back and forth through the water until it is filled.

*Community Museums Association of PEI*

Once the basket is filled, the moss is dragged up onto the beach and forked into a truck with high sideboards to hold large loads of moss.

*Irish Moss Interpretive Centre*
The moss is then taken from the shore and spread out on fishermen's lawns to dry so that they can get the best price possible.

Community Museums Association of PEI

2004's rate was 17 cents per pound for wet moss and 42 cents per pound for dry moss.

Community Museums Association of PEI

Once the moss is dry, it is trucked to one of the three local moss plants to be prepared and sold to an off island buyer who extracts the carrageenan.

Community Museums Association of PEI

When the moss is first trucked to the plants, it is dumped into what is known as a shaker, which does just as its name suggests. As the moss passes over the belt, it is vibrated to shake any excess of sand out of it.

Community Museums Association of PEI
Upon leaving the shaker, the moss lands on the floor and is gathered into huge piles using a loader or tractor with a bucket on the front. *Community Museums Association of PEI*

The high piles can be easily moved into a baler which compresses the moss and forms it into large square bales. *Community Museums Association of PEI*

Each bale weighs about 175 pounds, and are stacked until they are shipped to the purchaser who will extract and sell the valuable carrageenan. *Community Museums Association of PEI*