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Direct marketing strategies: The rise of community supported fishery programs ☆

Ayeisha Brinson *, Min-Yang Lee, Barbara Rountree

NOAA Fisheries, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, Social Sciences Branch, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, USA

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ABSTRACT

Community Supported Fishery (CSF) Programs are arrangements between fishermen and consumers where consumers provide upfront payments to fishermen in exchange for scheduled seafood deliveries. They are modeled after the popular Community Supported Agriculture Programs, a form of direct-to-consumer-marketing in which a group of individuals support a farm. There are multiple market and non-market benefits from these programs. Fishermen receive higher prices for fish, are guaranteed a stable income, and can activate political and regulatory support through direct interaction with consumers. Consumers are provided with access to high-quality novel types of fish and benefit from interactions with the producers of their food. CSFs have frequently collaborated with non-governmental organizations to address the challenges associated with these programs. Under the catch share system in the Northeast US groundfish fishery, sectors may be well-positioned to implement a CSF. Direct marketing through a CSF is not likely to completely replace traditional markets for fishermen, but can be a valuable supplement to their operations.

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1. Introduction

Community Supported Fisheries (CSFs) are a relatively new and innovative program modeled after Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Programs. CSFs are a form of direct marketing in which consumers provide upfront payments to fishermen in exchange for scheduled seafood deliveries. As of October 2010, there were thirteen CSFs in existence: 10 in the Northeast United States, two CSFs in North Carolina, and one CSF in Nova Scotia, as listed in Table 1. This research chronicles the growth and experiences of CSF programs in the US based on interviews with CSF fishermen and coordinators. The main goals of the CSF model are to increase profits for the local fishermen, provide high-quality seafood to interested consumers, and directly engage consumers using fishery products. This research describes CSAs and their similarities with CSF programs, examines the advantages and challenges facing CSFs, and identifies the implications of CSFs for US fisheries policy and management.

This research responds to growing public interest in local and sustainable food, particularly seafood [1,2]. In-person or phone interviews were conducted with representatives from seven CSFs on the US East Coast (Table 1). The interviews examined CSF program details, advantages, and challenges.

CSFs share many operational similarities; however, their seafood products vary based on location, catch, season, regulations, and product type (whole versus fillet) offered to consumers. Some CSFs offer shareholders a ‘basket’ of variable seafood products while others specialize in specific species such as Northern shrimp or American lobster. In the Northeast, the products sold through CSFs include groundfish (which may include species such as American plaice, witch flounder, haddock, pollock, cod, redfish, and hake), monkfish, crab meat, squid, and cooked lobster. The North Carolina CSFs sell shellfish (blue crab, oysters, and clams) and also provide many finfish, such as black sea bass, kingfish, mackerels, groupers, snappers, and dolphinfish.

1.1. Fishery management regulations

Sea scallops and American lobster are the most valuable fisheries in the Northeast United States; however, the groundfish fishery has particular historical significance. It played a major role in the development of commerce, trade, and society in New England. In 2009, landings of cod, haddock, and yellowtail flounder were worth $25, $14, and $5 million, respectively. The 19 stocks of groundfish are jointly managed under the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan because they are often harvested together: fishermen have imperfect control over the composition of their catch [3,4,5]. As of 2007, 11 of the 19

☆ Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA Fisheries.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 508 495 2007; fax: +1 508 495 2054.
E-mail address: ayeisha.brinson@noaa.gov (A. Brinson).

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Table 1
Community Supported Fisheries, location and cooperating partners in the US and Canada.

Name	Location	Start	Species	Partners
Port Clyde Fresh Catch	Port Clyde, ME	2007	Shrimp, groundfish	Island Institute, Midcoast Fishermen's Association
Cape Ann Fresh Catch	Gloucester, MA	2009	Groundfish	NAMA[a], GFWCA[b], MIT Sea Grant, Turner's Seafood
Community Fish	Stonington and Mount Desert Island, ME	2009	Shrimp, groundfish	Penobscot East
Eastman's Local Catch	Seabrook, NH	2009	Groundfish	NAMA
Hannah Jo[c]	Portland, ME	2009	Groundfish	NAMA
Maple Ridge Farm and Fishery	Yarmouth/Portland, ME	2009	Lobster and scallops	NAMA
Walking Fish	Beaufort/Durham, NC	2009	Mixed finfish and shellfish	Duke University, NC Sea Grant, Carteret Catch
Yankee Fishermen's Cooperative	Seabrook Harbor, NH	2009	Shrimp and groundfish	NH Sea Grant
Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association[d]	Chatham, MA	2010	Groundfish, scallops, lobster	USDA, Cape Cod EDA[e], Buy Fresh Buy Local Cape Cod
Cape Cod Weir Harvest	Chatham, MA	2010	Whole groundfish	NAMA
Core Sound Seafood	Chapel Hill/Raleigh, NC	2010		
Linda Kate Lobster Coop	Falmouth, ME		Lobster	NAMA
Off the Hook	Halifax, Nova Scotia	2010	Groundfish	Ecology Action Center, Nova Scotia Dept. of Fisheries
Revolutionary fish	New Bedford, MA	2010	Scallop, groundfish	

[a] Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance.
[b] Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association.
[c] The Hannah Jo CSF disbanded after one season.
[d] The Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association CSF is a pilot program for Fall 2010.
[e] Economic Development Association.

groundfish stocks were classified as overfished and experiencing overfishing [6]. The Northeast groundfish fishery has undergone many changes throughout the history of fisheries management, particularly in terms of regulations and catch profitability. Prior to May 1, 2010, the primary management tool was an input control, Days-at-Sea (DAS) under which fishermen were allocated a maximum number of fishing days. In addition, rolling area closures, gear restrictions, and trip limits were used to manage catch in this fishery. A catch share management system was implemented to replace Days-at-Sea management in the groundfish fishery. Seventeen self-organized sectors were created and allocated a transferable group quota; vessels not affiliated with a sector are managed under DAS coupled with a strict limit on total catch.

The Northern shrimp fishery is managed by a mix of input and output controls, including size limits, trip limits, and Total Allowable Catch. Currently, the shrimp stock is healthy, with no evidence of overfishing, allowing a 180-day winter season [7]. The vast majority (over 80%) of Northern Shrimp is landed in Maine. Processing shrimp is very capital intensive and there are few market outlets for Northern shrimp. All processing facilities for this species are located in Maine, limiting the marketability of shrimp caught in other states.

2. Direct marketing strategies in food production

2.1. What is Community Supported Agriculture?

Farm-to-fork programs, such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, have increased in popularity in the United States; these programs are briefly reviewed to provide context for the development of CSF programs. CSAs have exploded in popularity since the 1950s, when the first US based CSA was started [8]. There are currently more than 2500 CSAs in the US [9]. This direct marketing approach aims to connect consumers to agricultural producers, providing a seasonal supply of local, high-quality agricultural products to consumers while ensuring a reliable and stable income for farmers. Consumers, referred to as shareholders, receive seasonal, weekly deliveries of fresh, local produce at competitive prices.

There are four characteristics of CSA programs that distinguish them from traditional food marketing: risk sharing, advance payment, direct connections to producers, and increased sustainability [10]. In a CSA, a share represents a fraction of total annual production. Therefore, shareholders accept some of the risk from poor growing seasons. Advance payment provides income for farmers during non-growing seasons and can fund operating expenses. Through farm visits, personal interaction, and risk sharing, CSAs build community and social connections. Finally, many CSAs use sustainable farming practices and reduce food miles to minimize the environmental impact of food production. The impacts of CSAs on farmers have been mixed; studies have found that CSAs do not increase revenues, but that farmers are usually satisfied with these programs [10–13].

2.2. How do Community Supported Fisheries differ from Community Supported Agriculture?

An important component of CSAs is that farmers and consumers share the risk of agricultural production; risk sharing in CSFs follows a different model. CSFs do not sell shares that are based on a fraction of the daily catch; instead, shares are typically marketed as a fixed weight of fish to be delivered weekly. CSF participants are subject to timing risk instead of production risk. Poor weather, mechanical difficulties, or regulatory closures may disrupt the normal scheduled delivery of shares. To accommodate their customers, many CSFs increased fish delivery in subsequent weeks or lengthened the season to handle these unforeseen circumstances.

In a typical CSA, there is a large range of produce delivered in a weekly share and an even greater range across the entire growing season [14]. CSF share composition is less diverse than typical CSA shares. The CSFs in the Northeast tend to specialize in groundfish, shrimp and lobster; however, they are commonly sold separately depending on seasonal availability. The CSFs that offered groundfish to their shareholders received feedback indicating a preference for greater variety in their weekly shares. CSF operators

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