

Realizing the vision by building community

The whole fishing industry is in a state of transition. Every which way you look, the various wings of the industry are trying to figure out what the future holds.

How many visioning meetings have we all been a part of over the years? The Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA) did a visioning project, too, under the leadership of Craig Pendleton.

Aside from talking to Craig and ultimately *not* sending in the Fleet Visioning Project's survey he repeatedly asked me to fill out, I can't claim to have had any hand in the outcome.

But about 250 of you from various walks of life within and related to the fishing industry weighed in and came up with this general vision of the future of the groundfish fleet: A diverse, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable fleet that is managed through a participatory governance structure.

Specifically, you envisioned:

- A geographically distributed commercial and recreational fleet that includes all gear types and boat sizes;
- An economically viable, safe, and sustainable fleet that works with shoreside infrastructure to supply seafood and job opportunities for coastal communities;
- Participatory, accountable, and decentralized governance structures at various scales that include local involvement in decision-making and maintain an adaptive regulatory environment; and
- Fishery stakeholders who exhibit stewardship of resources that is consistent with the long-term health and restoration of the marine ecosystems.

I'm not really sure how many visioning efforts have come to the same conclusions, but I'd like to think that many of you who weren't part of the Fleet Visioning Project share these same conclusions and that those of you who were part of the process still see that vision.

Making it happen

Just like everyone else with a vision, we at NAMA are working to figure out how to implement what you visualized.

We know two things to be true.

First, fishermen need to make a living. The future under current management proposals is scary and unknown. I have yet to talk to one fisherman – groundfish fisherman or not – who has a clear idea of how the sector management process will change their lives and livelihoods.

The ones who are not groundfishing are concerned about precedent-setting policies, as they should be, not to mention possible migration into their fisheries by yet more displaced fishermen.

It's not just the groundfish pie that is getting smaller. Everyone is affected by these decisions. Just like the marine ecosystem, all aspects of the fishing industry are part of a web of mutuality.

Something has to be done to address this collective transition in the ocean, lives, and livelihoods.

Second, members of the nonfishing public have a role to play in this transition. Too much is at stake for them not to. There are two ways to move the public – through their hearts and through their stomachs.

Different strategies for reaching the heart range from focusing on the rights of animals to focusing on the rights of fishermen and everything in between. But if any of those strategies really were

working, we wouldn't be having this discussion.

And, the stomach-reaching approaches have turned out to be so confusing and myopic that they are not getting us where we need to be.

GUEST COLUMN

by Niaz Dorry

So, we are approaching things from a different perspective: reaching for consumer hearts through their stomachs with Community Supported Fisheries (CSFs).

Heart to stomach

CSFs are not a new concept. You pay for something in advance, and you pick it up when it's ready.

The Girl Scouts do it. Every school has a candy, stationary, or magazine sale that I'm sure all of you parents are painfully familiar with.

But where this concept has really created social and political change is in the farming movement.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is one of the fastest growing arms of agriculture. CSAs helped small- and medium-sized farms get a footing when farms were disappearing to agribusiness and industrialization. The old fighting strategies were not working as farmers

used methods that gained them inches at a time when they were losing acres.

Something had to be done to bring control back to the communities most affected – the producers and the consumers. CSAs became one powerful approach.

At stake was our food sovereignty: the integrity of our food supply; the safety of our food; our right to decide how we want our food to get to our tables; and what we would tolerate being applied to our food on its way to our stomachs.

Today, CSAs are providing a range of food from dairy to meat to chickens to vegetables. They are providing fresh food that speaks to the population through their stomachs.

See GUEST COLUMN, next page



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Guest Column Continued from previous page

And CSA members are taking political action every time they pick up their share. They are standing up for a way of doing business that they believe is economically and ecologically sound.

By their participation, farmers are setting in place worthy principles, which shareholders are so strongly committed to that they are willing to pay for the farm-produced food and business costs up front.

CSA supporters also are ready to weigh in when it's time to deal with law or regulatory proposals that would undermine their access to what they are paying for.

CSFs

Too often, seafood consumers are far removed from the source of their food. We need to connect the seafood lover back to the shores.

CSFs, created in the image of CSAs, are one way to get there. We have learned enough from the farming movement to know this strategy can help create positive social and political change where we need it now: on the water.

The first attempt at creating a CSF began in Port Clyde, ME. Facing overwhelming competition from imported farmed shrimp, something had to be done. In 2007, NAMA worked with the Port Clyde community to set up their pilot northern shrimp CSF, which has since grown to include groundfish.

The Port Clyde community blazed a major trail for the rest of us. What started out as an exercise in getting a better boat price for local shrimp has taken root in New England and beyond.

Currently, eight CSFs are operating in the region with more on the way. A list of them may be found on the NAMA web site at <www.namanet.org/our-work/market-transformation/community-supported-fishery/list-csfs>.

Right scale

The most recent CSF is a collaboration among NAMA, the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sea Grant College Program.

Serving the greater Boston area and the North Shore, this CSF has gathered a lot of steam and garnered a lot of attention.

Nearly 780 families signed up to receive a weekly share of seafood and many more are on waiting lists for the future. By the time you read this article, a second and third round already will have begun, increasing the number of families participating to over 1,000 strong, not to mention the fishermen signing up to



Cambridge, MA pickup sites are part of the Cape Ann Fresh Catch CSF. At left, Steve Parks, left, delivers fish at the Morse School. Shareholders wait for their seafood at Harvard University.



Niaz Dorry photos

supply these conscientious consumers with fresh seafood.

Imagine, over 1,000 families are hearing about who catches the fish, how fishery management challenges our ocean ecosystem, and what fishermen and fishing communities are facing.

They also are learning what role consumers can play to ensure the ocean isn't sold to the highest bidder, but rather entrusted to the communities that have an intrinsic connection to them, which includes both the people who catch the seafood and those who eat it.

Through the CSF movement, we will add more voice to those fishermen who advocate management that encourages fishing on a scale that matches the sustainable capacity of the ecosystem and allows them to feed their communities

without compromising the marine environment. This was the vision articulated through the Fleet Visioning Process.

In the meantime, fishermen can count on the hearts of the people in their greater community, which were brought together through their stomachs and the need for and belief in good food, to ensure they can make a living while going through the transition ahead.

Niaz Dorry

Niaz Dorry is the coordinating director of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance.



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