

National Summit on Community Supported Fisheries: Building a Network, Understanding Challenges and Opportunities, Defining Next Steps

Portsmouth, New Hampshire
May 30th – June 1st

Background

Fishermen and fishing communities are adapting to management measures that target ambitious goals for conservation and sustainability of fish stocks. This system is embedded within traditional seafood markets that distance harvesters and consumers. One way fishermen can adapt to these realities is to seek markets for their products outside of the traditional value-chain that often distributes revenue to a host of out-of-region middle-men. Community Supported Fisheries (CSFs), loosely based on the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model in which consumers pre-pay for a share of fresh local produce from local farmers, has been one approach that fishermen have explored to direct more money to boats while achieving a range of other social and environmental goals. Among these goals are 1) improving fishing community resiliency, 2) linking consumers with harvesters and facilitating communication between the two otherwise separate groups, 3) educating consumers about local fishers, fisheries management and ways to access locally harvested seafood and 4) allowing fishermen to continue their businesses under management designed to meet ecological targets. Over the last five years CSFs have grown dramatically in number and size on a national scale and a number of community-based organizational models similar to CSFs have emerged that market directly to consumers. The growth of CSFs has been nurtured by unique partnerships among fishers, community-based groups, and entities such as Sea Grant. Interest in CSFs from fishermen, fishery scientists, managers and fishing communities has been and continues to be widespread. Based on the history of CSA's and current trends with CSF's, we can expect that the number of CSF-like businesses will continue to multiply.

Despite their potential, a variety of technical barriers, risks, and overarching questions about the long-term viability of CSFs have developed. In particular, CSFs require that fishing communities develop skills and expertise in new areas such as processing, distribution, safe seafood handling, pricing, business planning, web-based business applications, the use of social-media in small-businesses, and marketing of seafood. Additionally, in many cases, permits, licenses, insurance and careful business planning are required.