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Economy of scales

The Boston Globe

Community-supported fisheries deliver the freshest catch to consumers. They could also be a boon for a troubled industry.



Fishing boat captain Dustin Ketchopulos (above, in Rockport) is interested in a CSF that would sell shrimp. (Pat Greenhouse/Globe Staff)

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ROCKLAND, Maine - On the first Saturday afternoon in March, warmer than any other afternoon in recent memory, Elizabeth Cuccinello pulls up to the Good Tern co-op. In the bed of her truck is a big turquoise cooler.

Soon people begin to arrive, greeting Cuccinello with hugs and small talk. She opens the cooler and pulls out bag after bag of freshly caught Maine shrimp. They are a bright carmine in their shells, feelers bristling and black eyes bright, many with bluish eggs attached. On the

tongue, these shrimp are particularly sweet and tender. People receive the bags into their arms, a gift from the sea. "I'm like the shrimp fairy," Cuccinello says.

This is one of seven drop-off points for Port Clyde Fresh Catch, which is a community-supported fishery: Participants sign up, pay a lump sum for the season, then receive a weekly share of seafood caught by the members of the Midcoast Fishermen's Cooperative. Pioneered here last year, the idea is spreading through Maine and beyond, with a CSF in the works for the Gloucester area that could ultimately serve Boston as well.

In the winter, Port Clyde Fresh Catch offers shrimp - wild and pulled from Maine waters rather than farm-raised and potentially treated with chemicals, from somewhere as far away as Thailand or Brazil. In the summer, it offers fish. On any given week this could be pollock, cod, hake, redfish - whatever the fishermen bring in. The fish are delivered gutted but whole, the shrimp still in their shells. The tradeoff for freshness is a bit more labor and a lack of choice (the CSF offers filleting instruction and recipes), but also shells and bones with which to make stock or fertilize the garden.

If this new model sounds familiar, that's because CSFs work in much the same way for fishermen as CSAs (community-supported agriculture) do for farmers, with many of the same benefits. Consumers get the freshest local food, and the money goes straight to producers, with no middleman. In addition to shrimp and fish, community-supported fisheries for lobster and mussels have now started up. For seafood lovers, CSFs are a boon. For fishermen in a troubled industry, they could be a lifeline.

Through Port Clyde Fresh Catch, participants pay \$90 for 10 pounds of shrimp a week for six weeks, or \$45 for a half-share of 5 pounds. That's \$1.50 a pound, considerably less than they'd pay at a market. (As for fish, last summer a 12-week share of 8 to 12 pounds a week was \$360, or \$2.50-\$3.75 a pound.)

But for fishermen, it's considerably more than what they get selling to wholesalers, who buy shrimp at just 30 to 40 cents a pound. When the wholesalers aren't buying, the fishermen are out of luck. [Continued...](#)

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