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Joshua Stoll

Students Team With NC Fishermen to Sell Local Seafood to Public

In a community-supported fishery, members of the public buy pre-paid "shares" that entitle them to weekly or bi-weekly deliveries of fresh fish and shellfish.

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DURHAM, N.C. -- Students at Duke University have teamed with Carteret County

fishermen to launch the region's first community-supported fishery that will sell locally caught seafood to the public.

The new Walking Fish program will deliver its first shipment of North Carolina seafood to Durham-area shareholders on Sept. 17. The 12-week program will continue through Dec. 10.

In a community-supported fishery, members of the public buy pre-paid "shares" that entitle them to weekly or bi-weekly deliveries of fresh fish and shellfish.

The types of seafood included in Walking Fish's packages will vary each week, depending on seasonal availability and weather conditions, said Joshua Stoll, one of 10 Master of Environmental Management students at Duke's Nicholas School of the Environment, who organized the program.

Over the course of the 12-week fall program, members can expect their packages to include popular species such as flounder, triggerfish, black drum, shrimp, clams, spot and mullet, Stoll said.

Depending on how much fish they want, members can buy full or half shares on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. They can select between fish that already has been filleted, or fish that has only been headed and gutted. Shares range in cost from \$70 to \$420. The order form for purchasing shares is online at www.walking-fish.org. Orders should be mailed by Sept. 8.

The fresh, refrigerated fish will be delivered to Durham from Beaufort each Thursday morning, and will be packaged and available for pick up by shareholders from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursdays at the Sarah P. Duke Gardens parking lot on Anderson Street.

The Walking Fish Web site lists the fishing methods used to catch each species, recipes for cooking them, as well as share options and prices.

Profits will support the commercial fishery in Carteret County and encourage environmental stewardship, Stoll said.

"Our goal is to increase access to locally harvested fish, let consumers know where and how their seafood was caught and, ultimately, strengthen our local food system," he said. "Buying direct from local sources brings in more income for local producers and helps promote more sustainable fishing practices."

Stoll got the idea for the community-supported fishery after talking with Dr. Susan Andreatta, associate professor of anthropology at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro and coordinator of Project Greenleaf, an organization devoted to promoting a local agro-food system in North Carolina. Andreatta has studied the challenges that small-scale fishermen face in marketing their seafood to local communities, and how community-supported programs might help fishermen as similar programs have helped small-scale local farmers.

In March 2009, Stoll and his fellow students in Duke Fish, the student chapter of the American Fisheries Society, presented their idea of launching a community-supported fishery to Carteret Catch, a marketing group that works to help sustain the county's fishing industry. The Duke University Marine Lab, where many of the Duke Fish members study, is in Carteret County.

"We went in to the meeting with the message that our project was an opportunity where consumers and fishermen alike could benefit. We had access to the market, resources and funding, but no knowledge of the fisheries or community members that need to be involved, which is where Carteret Catch would come in," Stoll said. "It turns out they're asking the same questions: How do we market our seafood? How do we sustain local communities? There's real overlap between our mission and their mission, and I think this partnership has real potential."

Community-supported fisheries already exist in some coastal communities, particularly the Northeast, but Stoll believes Walking Fish is the first that aims to bring the fish to shareholders in a metropolitan region so far inland.

If the pilot offering is successful, he and his colleagues plan to offer a similar 12-week program next spring and, over time, extend its scope.

"We want to include more fishermen and more coastal communities, and create new, locally relevant projects with similar goals," he said. "There are a lot of community-based fisheries projects emerging about the country and this is a perfect time to bring people together to have a conversation about what this all means. Is it just about eating local fish, or is it something bigger?"

Funding for the program was provided by Duke Fish and the Duke University Sustainability Office.

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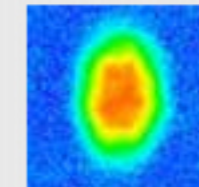
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