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Published: June 19, 2009 12:01 am

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700 sign up for seafood cooperative Fresh Catch program makes first delivery



By Richard Gaines
Staff Writer

At 4 p.m. yesterday, a line of two dozen people stood in the rain on a paved lot before a wharf on Rogers Street to pick up plastic bags, each containing about 5 to 10 pounds of dressed cod.

The shoppers had committed a fixed sum for 12 weeks of fresh fish to be delivered from boat to them without going through a series of middlemen.

Their investment will assure them fresh fish for about \$3 a pound, a bargain when measured against commercial market prices. And the suppliers are assured \$2 a pound, which is well above the commercial dockside average price of recent weeks.

"I'm hoping it helps the fishermen as well as the consumers," said Peter Lundelle of Rockport, who had signed up to be a member of the Cape Ann Fresh Catch program, which kicked off its initial season yesterday.

Yesterday's delivery marked the local start of an experiment in marrying the suppliers of fresh fish and the users in an effort aimed at bypassing the commercial process. The fish that were being bagged and taken home were caught either earlier in the day, or perhaps the day before.

The experiment in direct delivery from boat to broker to consumer is inspired by the Community Supported Agriculture program which has been a success here.

"I like fish, I like the Community Supported Agriculture program," said Bob Beattie of Rockport, who had contracted for about 5 pounds of fish each Thursday for the next 12 weeks.

There is no guarantee on the kind of fish buyers received, but the product is delivered cleaned — though not filleted.

The fish delivered yesterday were landed at a wharf at the end of Commercial Street, then shipped around the corner to Fisherman's Wharf on Rogers Street for transfer to the participants of the alternative business model created by the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance. Fish were also trucked from Commercial Street to Marblehead.

The model is that of a purchasing cooperative and intended to "undermine the industrial-scale model," said Niaz Dorry of the marine alliance directing the enterprise. Partnering with the alliance is the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association.

The buyers, such as Lundelle and Beattie, are considered "shareholders," said Dorry.

In the pilot program, she said, about 750 people have signed contracts for either a full share (about 8 to 12 pounds of fish) or a half share, delivered to a predetermined location in eight pilot communities, including Gloucester. Another 500 people, she said, are on a waiting list.

The pilot program lasts 12 weeks, and participation costs \$360 for a full share and \$180 for a half share.

In addition to Gloucester and Marblehead, other communities on the delivery end are Cambridge, Jamaica Plain in Boston, Acton, Lincoln, and at Appleton Farms in Ipswich.

The fish comes straight from the boats to the Gloucester unloading dock that is under lease to the Boston Seafood Display Auction. That auction is owned by the Canastra brothers of New Bedford, who also operate the Whaling City Seafood Display Auction.

The nonprofit alliance brokerage pays a fixed fee — an impressive \$2 a pound — for a mixed catch of any kind of fish. So far, six of the 20 boats that land with the Boston auction have agreed to supply the alliance with fish.

"Right now," said Dorry, "we have a limited shareholder base, so we're taking only part of their catch. Part of the business model is that we will get to the point that we can get the entire catch."

"This cooperative system keeps fishermen safer because they don't have to fight the weather to go offshore for certain species," said Angela Sanfilippo, president of the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association. "If the weather is dangerous, they can stay close to shore and catch only what the (shareholders) need this week.

"At the same time," she went on, "shareholders are guaranteed the freshest, highest quality fish caught.

"The fish caught for the program will never be old or frozen," Sanfilippo said, "and it will always come from fishermen who believe in working with the ocean and the community."

"The response at the drop-off locations (at the start of the business this week) is so exciting, inspiring and heart-warming," Dorry said. "I wish fishermen who are getting beaten up in the management area could feel the love."

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Photos



Niaz Dorry, far right, director of the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, organizes the first day of pick ups at the Fishermen's Wharf for Cape Ann Fresh Catch, a Community Supported Fishery. **Kate Glass/Gloucester Daily Times** (Click for larger image)



Willow Phoenix, 7, center, makes a face as Steve Parkes hands her and her mother, Shawna Phoenix, cod from Cape Ann Fresh Catch, a Community Supported Fishery, on Roger Street in Gloucester. "You don't know what you're going to get so it forces you to be creative," Shawna Phoenix said. **Kate Glass/Gloucester Daily Times** (Click for larger image)

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