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Catch up with a CSF for fresh, local fish

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Two community supported fisheries programs to begin this fall



Weir fishing nets off Chatham. Photo by John Fitts.

By Bethany Gibbons

Savvy seafood lovers will want to catch up with the two community supported fisheries programs slated to run this fall. Cape Cod Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association (CCCHFA) and [Cape Weir Harvest](#) will offer locals the opportunity to join the wave of Cape Codders committed to supporting sustainable fisheries and keeping their dollars local, all while enjoying some of the freshest seafood available.

Weir fishing in the fall and spring

Cape Weir Harvest ran Cape Cod's first CSA this spring, supplying weir harvested fish to half a dozen members for a period of four weeks. Linda Kelley of George's Fish Market in Harwich partnered with Shareen Davis and Ernie Eldredge, owners of Chatham Fisheries, who operate weirs in Nantucket Sound. Members of the CSF paid \$40 a week for eight to ten pounds of whole fish, or \$20 a week for four to six pounds. Their pick-up location was Chatham Natural Market. As weir fishing is seasonal, this fall's CSF will bring in other fishermen. "We have a couple of boats signed up," said Kelley. "We have the scallop boat and the lobster boat, now we're just waiting to get the finfish boat and that will be the last piece of the puzzle." There are no restrictions on the number of participants allowed in the CSF, at this time. Cape Weir Harvest has been working with Chatham-based [Women of Fishing Families](#) to create more partnerships, and they continue to work with NAMA, or the [Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance](#), to develop their program. "NAMA's been leading the effort up and down the East Coast to support local fishing and create sustainable fisheries,"

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said Davis.

CCCHFA launches pilot program

CCCHFA will be starting their pilot program this fall with a maximum of 50 members, and the CSF will run for four to six weeks. The first few seasons will be subsidized by a grant from the [Cape Cod Economic Development Council](#). "We will partner with the fishermen most willing to participate and be flexible," said Amy Morris of CCCHFA, who is administering the CSF. For the pilot, they will most likely do business with a hook fisherman, but CCCHFA's member fishermen also include many gillnetters. Morris said the CSF would offer seafood gathered with "the cleanest fishing methods available." This fall they will offer finfish like cod, haddock, and some monkfish. "When we diversify our gear, you'll see more variety," said Morris.

"When we diversify our gear, you'll see more variety." - Amy Morris of CCHFA

A positive response

This summer CCCHFA initiated a consumer survey, sponsored by [Buy Fresh. Buy Local](#). Morris said the response from 254 participants was overwhelmingly positive. (At press time, the survey was still available on the CCCHFA website.) While respondents gave two thumbs up to the prospect of a CSF, there were less enthusiastic about some of the details. One question asked consumers how comfortable they would be filleting and shucking their own seafood. Morris said the result was "a little south of neutral."

Regulations and whole vs. fillet

Both CCCHFA and Cape Weir Harvest have modeled their programs after the very successful [Cape Ann Fresh Catch](#) program operating out of Gloucester, and, for a little more money, members can get their fish in fillets instead of whole. "Gloucester is a little different because they have a large infrastructure," said Morris. "Once filleted, it's a whole new gamut of regulatory issues. We may offer consumers the option to have a share that is half whole fish and half fillets."

Stipulations on the handling of seafood also affect the kinds of fresh caught food that CSFs can offer. CCCHFA's survey found respondents "very interested" in shellfish. "Regulatory-wise, shellfish is more challenging," said Morris. "There is more permitting investigation needed before we can offer that, and we'll need more partners to come in to fill that need."

The direct distribution model

CSAs, or community supported agriculture, provide a truly direct distribution model, in which farmers offer shares of their harvest and bring the produce from the field to the pick-up destination, or consumers collect their shares at the farm. CSFs are guided by the same principles: secure the best price for the farmer or fisherman, paid up front; keep more consumer dollars local and keep more locally-produced food as close to its source as possible, building sustainability and growth into the local foodshed; and connect consumers with where their food comes from, educating them to eat seasonally and learn more about where and how their food was produced. However, the local CSFs must still partner with a fish market for regulatory reasons. "Handling and distributing have to go through a seafood dealer or fish house," said Morris. There are permits required for almost every step of the journey a fish takes from the boat to your plate, and, as Morris points out, "fish markets have multiple permits. The fish market is the most important part."

Chatham Fisheries, which partnered with George's for the Cape Weir Harvest, has some uniqueness to how it handles its weir-caught fish. "We have one of the last remaining family-owned commercial fishing docks in Massachusetts. We pack our own fish." Davis was familiar with George's because of the market's longstanding presence in the area (they've been selling fish since 1976) and because of their commitment to buying locally harvested fish, including weir-caught fish. She was happy to work with the Kelley's for philosophical reasons, but also because "they can do the reporting to the state."

Neighbor to neighbor

Regulatory issues can be dampening to the spirit, but Cape Weir Harvest and CCCHFA are filled with excitement and buoyed by the chance to connect their fishermen with buyers in the community. "It's all about community rapport - it's a

"For us to put aside a couple of boxes of fish, knowing that it's not going to be shipped to



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neighbor to neighbor thing,” said Davis. “We get a better value for our catch, and a closer connection to our community...We keep the fish local and consumers get to keep their dollars in their own community.” Even the way they delivered their fish this spring reflected the close-knit community they inhabit and want to extend to others. “Our truck was a local gillnet guy’s. He sells his fish and had the permitted vehicle to transport fish. We thought it would be cheaper than leasing a truck and when we asked him how much he wanted for letting us take it to the market once a week, he said, ‘Just put gas in it.’” Ernie Eldredge had the distinction of setting aside a couple of hours each week to hand the fish over to the CSF customers. “He got to talk to people he normally doesn’t get to see,” Davis said. When asked if diverting some of their catch from its established route to fill the CSF orders was more trouble than it was worth, Davis replied, “For us to put aside a couple of boxes of fish, knowing that it’s not going to be shipped to Boston, Rhode Island or New York, and know that we’re keeping that product local and providing fresh seafood to our community, it’s more than worth it.”

Boston, Rhode Island or New York, and know that we’re keeping that product local and providing fresh seafood to our community, it’s more than worth it.” - Shareen Davis



A boatload of flavor

If you’ve never tried super fresh squid, haddock or cod, you’ve been missing a boatload of flavor and a delicate texture not found in less-fresh fish. Fresh is best, but the local CSFs offer more than a commitment to the quality of their products. Whole fish offer home cooks a rare opportunity to use as much or as little of the fish as their hearts desire, and chances are they’ll use more. Traditional market fillets exclude “belly meat” and cheeks, once commonly utilized by Cape Cod families. Small fish can be steamed whole. Racks, or the heads, tails and bones, can be used to create vitamin-rich, gelatin-boasting, nutritious fish stock, highly espoused by Sally Fallon, author of *Nourishing Traditions* and president of the *Weston A. Price Foundation*. Fallon writes, ‘Fish stock... is especially rich in minerals, including the all-important iodine.’ CSF members have the chance to play with their food and can feel good about wasting less of the catch.

A catch for all seasons

The catch itself can offer something new for members. Davis and Eldredge’s weirs produced squid, mackerel, butterfish and scup for their CSF’s members. “Very rarely are butterfish, squid, and scup seen in the market anymore,” said Davis. “This is our diet in the spring. My husband always says when the forsythia is out, the squid are here.” Supermarkets that import food from all over the world might lead some to believe that it’s perfectly natural to eat a ripe blueberry on Cape Cod in February, but CSA members might still be familiar with local gardening cycles – peas in spring; corn and tomatoes in summer; and butternut squash and cranberries in fall. Local seafood aficionados should also expect to eat squid in May and June; bluefish and striped bass in July; and cod and bay scallops in fall. Market proliferation of locally out-of-season fish species imported from oceans all over the world might muddle a local’s understanding of the natural migrations and stock fluctuations occurring just off-shore, but hooking up with a CSF is a great way to get back in touch with the marine ecosystem and it’s fruits. “We really want to educate people about the what, when, where and how of their fish,” said Amy Morris. “We expect that consumers will learn about seasonality.” Shareen Davis agreed, “We want people to enjoy eating naturally and seasonally.”

Bethany Gibbons is the author of the blog [Cape Native](#). She is a native Cape Codder and an avid fisherwoman. For more uncut, raw and unpasteurized notes from her farm, click [here](#).

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melvinreine [Member] writes: 08/24/10 @ 1:21 pm

Jeff Perry is not involved in this.

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Monponsett [Member] writes:

08/24/10 @ 11:01 pm

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