



California Sea Grant College

UCSB to Launch Seafood Program



Santa Barbara father-son fishermen Dana McCorkle (left, holding up a halibut) and Mike McCorkle on F/V Pie Face in the Santa Barbara harbor.
Photo: Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara

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Fishermen in Santa Barbara may soon be able to sell their catches directly to the UC Santa Barbara community through a pilot community-supported fishery program that it is hoped will help re-vitalize the local fishing industry.

As envisioned by the fishermen and scientists leading the project, members of the UCSB community will be able to buy pre-paid "shares" that entitle them to scheduled deliveries – typically weekly or bi-weekly – of locally caught fresh fish and shellfish. Think: rock crab, California halibut, black cod, white seabass, spot prawns and sea urchin, among others.

Members would also periodically receive educational materials related to their deliveries, such as seafood recipes and handling tips.

The idea for the seafood program is modeled after community-supported agricultural programs, more commonly known as CSAs, which have become popular with health-conscious Americans interested in

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supporting local organic farmers.

Community-supported fisheries, or CSFs, which are up and running mostly on the East Coast, appeal to a similar demographic – foodies who value fresh seafood and want to know where that seafood is coming from, the so-called "slow foods movement."

"Santa Barbara has a fishing heritage that is an integral part of the community's identity," says the seafood project's leader Kim Selkoe, a marine ecologist at the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis at UC Santa Barbara. "The CSF is about our local fishermen getting credit for the regulations that they adhere to, and giving them a leg up on imported seafood products that may be illegally caught, improperly labeled, and potentially contaminated."

Selkoe, California Sea Grant Marine AdvisorCarolynn Culver and Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara President Stephanie Mutz were recently awarded a grant from the Associated Students Coastal Fund at UCSB to help kickstart the seafood program.



Santa Barbara fisherman Steve Escobar holds a trap-caught spot prawn on F/V Ocean Pearl. Photo: Matt Rice

Funding is making it possible for the team to survey the campus' demand for the program and its seafood preferences. Results will be folded into a business plan for the fishing community that will, among other things, identify who will catch what and when for the CSF, and the prices that would be paid for the catches. All this to ensure that CSF members have a steady supply of popular seafood.

The Santa Barbara fishing community is a small-boat, owner-operated fleet of about 200 fishermen, says Mutz, who is also a commercial sea urchin diver.

"The CSF allows the fleet to adapt to stricter regulations and marine protected areas, and to the globalization of the seafood marketplace," she says. "It also provides an opportunity to educate the public about the local fishing culture, community and its responsible fishing practices."

The short-range plan is to begin selling seafood directly to the UC Santa Barbara community in early 2012 and then, looking forward, to build a larger fishermen-owned retail outlet for direct sales to the whole community.

"Direct sales could help the entire community," says California Sea Grant's Culver. "Not only could it make local seafood more accessible to consumers and more profitable for fishermen; but, perhaps more importantly, it could enhance people's understanding of local fishing and connect them to the fishing community. This is critical for the long-term viability of commercial fishing in Santa Barbara."

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