

## Diving out of the ivory tower, fisherman organizes on the docks

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Stephanie Mutz was on track to becoming a professor. She earned a bachelor's degree in marine biology from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a master's degree in tropical marine biology from James Cook University in Australia. But while her thesis was being reviewed she took a job as a deckhand and didn't look back.

Mutz has operated her own boat, primarily dive fishing for urchins and snails, while also trapping fish, rock crab, spiny lobster, and Santa Barbara spot prawns. She now serves as President for Commercial Fishermen of Santa Barbara, a non-profit organization that strives to create new models for collaboration by connecting fishermen with each other and with fishery scientists. CFSB is a member of the Ecotrust-backed Community Fisheries Network, which held its third annual meeting in March.



*Stephanie Mutz serves as a go-between for fish harvesters and communities in Santa Barbara.*

*Photo: Fran Collin*

CFSB operates by Golden rule: only sell what you can catch. They partner with the Santa Barbara Fish Market, which is 200 yards from the pier and will fillet their fish for free.

While Mutz does serve as an adjunct professor of biology for Ventura Community College, her overall educational approach is grassroots. She holds a number of positions on advisory and executive boards, including serving as Co-founder for Santa Barbara's first and only Community Supported Fishery.

**Q.** How is CFSB evolving?

**A.** Fishermen are talking together more, working through issues, and coming up with resolutions. We're becoming more formal with bylaws and insurance policies. We'd also like to engage more in marketing. But we want to keep our focus at the community level. The largest boat size is 60 feet and we only have two of those; the average boat size is 30 feet. Inventory isn't always consistent, depending upon the circumstances. We tell restaurants that a good way to think about us is don't put us on the menu, put us on the chalkboard.

**Q.** What are the benefits of working with someone in Maine or Alaska, through the Community Fisheries Network?

**A.** Having a national network like the CFN provides a common ground—it's a way to hear other people's stories and issues and see how ours compare. If we've dealt with the issue here, we can provide advice to others and vice versa. The network provides strength in numbers and support for common struggles.

**Q.** What does your outreach to the community look like?

I want to nerd out and tell people all the things they want to learn about. I now talk to food clubs, at festivals, and to people who want to know more about harvesting/quirky biology about seafood. My passion has always been teaching, and I've realized that I prefer grassroots, organic education.

When I first started outreaching to the community seven or so years ago, I was on my soap box, telling people what they should and shouldn't do and I realized that I have to relate to people on their level. I'm still learning how to get my message out in language that is accessible to the public and sometimes I need to tone down my approach. I used to teach people how to fillet a fish and boil a crab on Earth Day. Some people had a visceral reaction to me killing food right there on Earth Day!

**Q.** Is there a good return on investment in outreach?

**A.** We're seeing a lot more fishermen getting involved in direct marketing, but it is extra work. I enjoy helping people with strategy; I'd like to be a consultant for fishermen. There's a communal nature to the industry—consumers like knowing where their food is coming from and fishermen like seeing where their food goes.