

Seafood Marketing Steering Committee Meeting #6

Meeting Summary

Friday, May 3rd 2019, 10-12

Weston Public Library

87 School Street, Weston, MA 02493

In attendance: Representative Gifford, Dan McKiernan (Deputy Director of DMF, chairman sitting in for Director Pierce), Bill Doyle, Frank Mirarchi, Ellie Leaning

DMF staff: Wendy Mainardi, Story Reed

Audience members: Ed Doherty, Nichola Williams

Dan: Welcome. David Pierce could not be here today. This is our 6th meeting. It's never too early to think about the next grant cycle. Highlight of this past year was our presence at the Seafood Show.

Frank Mirarchi: I am concerned about the corporatization of fishing fleets. We want to sell fish like a unique, local food with a story behind it, not like a commodity.

Wendy: We have had three grant cycles so far: two general and one research. Having a theme to the grant might make it easier for applicants and lends to better projects. This year we did fewer grant recipients for more money – details in a minute. One possible theme for next year is to assist small businesses because they have applied in the past. We should decide if we want this theme over the summer to post in early fall.

A majority of the Seafood Expo North America's attendees are actually from the United States. "Mass. Ave." is a cluster of businesses from the Commonwealth. They each had a Mass. Ave. sign (shown). We had a ribbon cutting in which Secretary Beaton, Representative Gifford, Commissioner Amidon, etc. spoke. We also had the Lt. Governor come by. This was a joint project between DMF and MDAR with USDA funds accessed. We started before this time last year with discussions with Diversified and a large email to our dealer/wholesaler list. There were times when we weren't sure that Mass Ave would launch.

Bill Doyle: Businesses are eligible for 50% reimbursement through Food Export Northeast. It made it easier to go. I haven't done it in decades. I had two other guys with me, and we got lots of interest. We participated in the additional programming provided by Food Export Northeast before the show. I think people who were there on Mass. Ave. were very pleased. We were able to meet people we hadn't seen

for years or haven't been able to reach outside of the show. We got several new customers and several pending customers.

The seafood show turned international in the late 80s/early 90s. A lot of the regional people pulled out then. It's a lot easier to display at the BCEC than the Hynes convention Center.

If we could work with Diversified and say that Mass. Ave. is consolidated, then we could set up a day earlier with the big guys, and that would be very helpful.

Wendy: We have a lot of Mass. Ave. 2020 interest from those that were there. The advertising budget is a part of our operating budget. The deadline for returning businesses is May 17th.

The banner and ad were done by DMF as promotional material, and we could just change the logos next year for cost savings. Hopefully we could add a large hanging banner. The scaling up would not be very expensive for us. I am working on the emails with Bonita at MDAR now.

Dan: This is low hanging fruit. People have been asking why we haven't had a presence at the Seafood Show, and we thought people wouldn't move - really pleased with this development. Red's Best was already at the Show, but decided to move to join us.

Story: We were able to promote general Massachusetts seafood while also promoting Mass. Ave.

Dan: Can we do promotion without paying for it because it's a quasi-state building?

Wendy and Story: No. We met with David Gibbons (director of BCEC). Diversified owns everything and charges for everywhere.

Bill Doyle: Let's take a trip to Portland and meet with Diversified in person. The show is a party for the seafood community. It is a business event but it's also become a - St. Patrick's Day party in Boston. I had never seen this before. As the show shuts down, bands come in and booths set up parties. The biggest party is the state of Alaska's party - Hundreds of people. Something smaller scale, like a party on the floor, could be good. I don't think I could sell beer, but you can bring in beer after 5. We could have some food.

Nichola: We could get local beer donated.

Wendy: As part of the ribbon cutting, the grant awardees were announced by Secretary Beaton:

\$25,000 - Fishing Partnership Support Services: Involving Massachusetts Fishermen in Seafood Traceability Programs. The Fishing Partnership will research current seafood traceability programs and present the information to fishermen and stakeholders across the Commonwealth to inform them of opportunities and technologies. It will conduct roundtable discussions to gather feedback concerning the most effective ways to increase participation in traceability programs so that fishermen can receive a premium price for their catch to improve the economic security of Massachusetts fishing families.

Frank: The Partnership Support Services does the health insurance and safety training. The Partnership works on policy such as wind farms currently. Baseline monitoring and accountability is being worked on, and this issue will be growing.

Dan: I just spoke to a dealer on the Chesapeake, and his opinion was that if you want to get paid more, it's all about traceability. People are aware of incorrectly labeled seafood.

Wendy: To confirm this, our other research grant project is one on traceability and willingness to pay:

\$50,000 - Michael T. Carroll and Josh Weirisma: Assessing Massachusetts Consumer Preferences to Purchase Local and Fully Traceable Seafood. The authors will create a survey tool to assess consumer preferences for local, fully traceable seafood to better understand the purchasing decisions and attitudes towards Massachusetts seafood products and attributes. The research will be administered to seafood shoppers at major supermarkets across different regions of the state to inform stakeholders about the New England ground fish market.

Frank: We need to be able to link who caught the fish to the consumer. In Scituate we are trying to do this on a small level. This validates our story. We need tools to tell the truth: block chain and easy graphics easy for consumers.

Ellie: Some of the guys on the Cape have an arrangement with Wholefoods. Ground fish landed at Pigeon Cove was sold in the Hyannis store. They had a great display, but it was so hard on front of house staff that it was discontinued. Yesterday we heard they are ending it. I will do more research to see if it's too late for this program.

Frank: he technology exists to label fish, like printing on board/barcode.

Ellie: The local question has come up again: how it's defined and where caught vs. where it's processed.

Dan/Story: Let's look into this and feed some of this to Mike and Josh.

Story: The 3rd grant award we discussed last meeting:

\$41,034 - Urban Harbors Institute at University of Massachusetts Boston: Developing Port Profiles and a Commercial Fishing Infrastructure Assessment for Massachusetts Coastal Harbors. Urban Harbors Institute will gather information for each fishing harbor in Massachusetts by conducting a survey, interviews, an analysis of existing data, and research to develop unique port profiles. The profiles aim to ensure that the space, infrastructure, and amenity needs of the commercial fishing communities are met, and that decision-makers are informed about existing inventory so that municipalities and communities can have a bench-mark and improve upon current conditions.

There has been a need from the industry and the Seaport Economic Council loved it, but had no funding for it. Urban Harbors Institute, a small working group with Dan the Alliance, and I, as well as some of you have reviewed the survey questions. The draft has gone out for feedback to fishermen and harbor masters, and we made improvements based on that. It was distributed mid-March.

Harbormasters get one per harbor, which they have done. Commercial fishermen that are permitted by us and charter boats got the survey, 2,500 got it. Then, other groups have promoted it. 348 fishermen have completed it so far. We are seeing if there are any geographic holes.

Dan: This builds on previous data, and we'll be able to see how things change over time. Let's get money into the small harbors as well as the big ones.

Story: This is a draft of Marion (shown on screen). There are live pounds landed, permit data, vessel data, and activity level. This is a first crack at displaying our data. We are going to have to be fluid at display. We have confidentiality rules to deal with also (there needs to be more than three to aggregate).

Rep Gifford: Legislators can definitely use this.

Story: We will create port profiles eventually, then maybe do regional profiles.

Dan: We get a lot of requests for snapshots of regions.

Frank: This is really important for us to rejuvenate smaller ports. From our perspective, it's really difficult to characterize the value of fishing, IE, niche species. A single source of information is really important. The paradox: wealth in the ports and port area zoning design. Marinas have more resources than fishermen. Wealth creates competition, but also creates the market for the seafood. There's a fine line between having place to work and having a place to sell. This research addresses this: they can see that they should keep property open for fishing because of the value of the seafood product. This is the way people can see how value is added. The old days of the gritty waterfront are gone, every square inch is competition, and we need info to hold our place. It adds validity to our arguments.

Wendy: I go to the MA Food System Collaborative meetings, and it has been good to keep in touch and be present at meetings such as climate change. SPAT is going to the Fish Fry this year. Farm to School: we are going to try to go to a school this year.

Seafood Day at the Statehouse has been set for October 10th, and October is National Seafood Month. The idea is can we hold this Steering Committee meeting before that meeting in the Statehouse, then we can join Seafood Day? It's been a while since we have met in the Statehouse.

Rep Gifford: There is a nice room on the fourth floor. I can see if it is available. We might have met there for our first meeting 3.5 years ago.

We can do 9:30 a.m. and then all go down together.

Ellie: Some of us will have to unload and set up.

Wendy: We can look at the times and talk to the people.

Dan: After would be too late, and this can enhance both events.

Wendy: Our website is slowly launching. We heard from you that you want people to understand that seafood is sustainable, and it has been posted. We will email out the link so people can send customers there.

We are discussing what to do this summer. First: zip trips, then Eating with the Ecosystem.

I have attempted two targeted weeks for two years and they haven't really worked great (squid, etc.). Therefore, the idea is to bring in an outside partner. And we can bring in our existing partners: Eating with the Ecosystem, MRA, billboard, Boston Seafood Festival. Does this equal a species promotion or seasonal?

Dan: Let's make this an annual thing.

Wendy: Yes, we can establish something that we do every year like Rhode Island's Quahog Week.

Ed: Black sea bass would be great because they are here and big.

Bill Doyle: The species that needs help is scup. It's abundant and needs its value increased. Maybe we can look for a market for the Director's favorite fish?

Wendy: This committee doesn't want to focus on underutilized species.

Ellie: Last year was black sea bass focused at Hooker's Ball. Sea bass was really popular, so it's a great idea. It's best to promote all species, but the more difficult ones first. We have done skate and dogfish.

Ed: Scup is too small.

Nichola: Ethnic communities love scup, aka porgy. People really connect with this fish.

Dan: is there a disconnect between dealers and consumers?

Bill Doyle: This is just like the European durad royal. We still box it into big boxes and it's cheap. There is a lot of opportunity. There are farms in Greece that send this into NYC. I'd like to go to Food Arts Magazine and say this is a local sustainable opportunity that tastes great - It's on menus, but not sourced locally.

Frank: Scup is a species of opportunity. Small hake and whiting are also small. Particularly, the smaller ones are priced below affordability to bring them in. Don't lose sight that practically every species doesn't reach the value. There could be a niche; I don't know exactly what it is.

Wendy: Could we do a "small fish" month or a general Mass Seafood Week?

Nichola: We want to encourage people to eat seasonally. Then you can promote both underutilized and not. Eaters are more educated and they want to eat local.

Dan: Let's get these species into the media.

Nichola: You could do an ad-editorial.

Ellie: Regarding seasonality, frozen fish blows it up. We haven't figured out a good way of communicating this yet.

It's good to not be species specific because people aren't eating enough seafood in general. GMRI is working on a food quality standards grant for different species. We are where Alaska was in the 60s and 70s in knowing about quality of seafood.

Dan: What can we do for scup?

Bill Doyle: DMF worked on calamari. What if we took \$10k and bought some scup, sized it, and went to a Sysco and a Davios restaurant group and said "You guys are local, sustainable. Here, this will help local fisherman, and it's prime sashimi fish." And we can give it to them.

Ellie: That's exactly what we did for Pier to Plate with dogfish and skate. We got restaurants what they wanted. Consumer demand is there, especially if there are no substitutions, now we have an issue of stocking the skate.

Wendy: This scup project is different from the summer project, and they are both going to be group efforts. I think we can afford to do both or we can plan for next year.

Dan: The model is we set up a contract to buy it and distribute it.

Bill Doyle: If you call Chuck Frasier, President of Sysco, and get a meeting, bring Frank and Wendy and Story. Tell him this is what we want and bring him some fish. They have a test kitchen and storage and customer base. Make it easy. They are located south of Boston.

Wendy: Yes, and let's do something this summer that people will come to know.

Ellie: Alex and Jared have black sea bass so work with them

Nichola: A list of retailers and restaurants would be helpful, and make sure that you get material into the retailers.

Bill Doyle: Get a Mass Seafood food truck that we could use to do these things that's ready to go. Then you can just go.

Nichola: August is Eat Local month, and there is usually a seafood component. This is run by SBN. There is a website we could list the retailers. Tap into what's already going on.

Rep Gifford: My aid is working on the room at the Statehouse currently. The amendment to allow processing lobster parts passed in the House, and hopefully shouldn't be a problem in the Senate.

Dan: Meeting adjourned.