

# FIRST-EVER 'MARKET BLITZ' TALLIES AVAILABILITY OF LOCAL SEAFOOD

By Judy Benson



Michelle Anderson, manager at Flanders Fish Market, arranges flounder filets from local fishermen in the display case at the East Lyme store on March 6. Photo: Judy Benson



Christopher Dodge, a volunteer with Eating With the Ecosystem, records the types and origins of fish and shellfish for sale at Flanders Fish Market during the nonprofit group's first "Market Blitz" survey on March 6. Photo: Judy Benson

Late one morning in March, Flanders Fish Market manager Michelle Anderson kept busy stocking the ice-filled display cases with steamers from Maine and rainbow trout from Idaho between selling customers local scallops and orders of fish-and-chips to go.

"The sea scallops are from Stonington," she told Christopher Dodge, with a clipboard and pencil in hand that distinguished him from a typical customer.

As he jotted down the names, origins and prices of the products in the case – previously frozen bay scallops from China, haddock and cod from Canada, Arctic char from Iceland, monkfish from Massachusetts – a new shipment arrived at the East Lyme market in a Styrofoam box. Inside were 10 pounds of glistening white flounder filets had just been delivered by a wholesaler, hours after being caught by Connecticut fishermen.

"People want local items," said Anderson, as she arranged the filets in the case. "They'll wait to get the local scallops and flounder."

For Dodge, a marine science educator and boat captain for Save the Bay, an environmental advocacy group that works in Connecticut and Rhode Island, the arrival of the flounder was well timed for his task. A volunteer for the nonprofit group Eating with the Ecosystem, he was part of its first-ever Market Blitz campaign to find out what's available at retail outlets to seafood consumers in New England.

"I've been in the marine science field since 2002," said Dodge, an adjunct professor at Southern Connecticut State University and Lyme resident. "I believe that every piece of data we have about the fishing industry is a good thing. My career and my personal enjoyment depends on what's going on in the ocean."

Kate Masury, program director with Eating with the Ecosystem, said the purpose of the Market Blitz is to get a snapshot of the seafood species available in New England, how it's labeled, and how much shelf space is occupied by species caught in New England waters compared to other sources. Modeled after a "bioblitz" in which scientists and volunteers engage in a short, intense effort to record all species in a specific area, the Market Blitz is one of the ways Eating with the Ecosystem is looking to carry out its mission. On its website, that's summed up as: "transforming New England's seafood marketplace into a support system for its ecosystems and the people who depend on them" and "balancing our diets with what the ecosystem produces."

At Flanders Fish Market, the local offerings in the display case that day consisted of sea scallops, oysters and flounder. But a sign on the wall told customers that more local products could be obtained by special order. The list included blackfish, bluefish and shad.

"When people ask for things, we'll get them," Anderson said.

Masury said grocery store fish counters and dedicated fish markets in all six New England states were surveyed over two weeks in March for the Market Blitz. In Connecticut, blitz volunteers collected data at nine stores and markets. She expected to release results this spring. Along with the percentage of New England seafood offered, the data will also show availability of specific regional species, prevalence of labels that identify local sources and use of local branding such as the Gulf of Maine "Responsibly Harvested" seal.

"We don't have statistics about what the New England seafood marketplace looks like – how much is local and how much shelf space goes to local items," Masury said. "We're hoping this information will be useful for our projects and for other groups as well."