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WRACKLINES

WHERE CONNECTICUT MEETS THE SOUND



From Sea to Table
*Fish, shellfish and sea vegetables
from local waters*

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From the EDITOR

A WRACK LINE TO LOCAL SEAFOOD

Clamshells, fish bones and a mangled water bottle lie near a ribbon of kelp. On either side sprawl driftwood, eelgrass shards and stones tumbled smooth by the surf.

That's the close-up view from one of the many wrack lines I noticed in my search of beaches this spring. Looking up, I scanned the beach to see the wrack line snaking along the entire shore, marking where the last high tide met the sand.

Wrack lines – always changing, capturing bits of nature alongside the garbage of human civilization – really are a fitting metaphor for what this magazine is about. They move as sea level rises. Storm surges leave buoys, broken boards and discarded tires atop the small remnants of marine life that usually make up most of the wrack line. These bands of shells, rockweed, bits of hay stalks and all sorts of parts and pieces attract shorebirds searching for tiny crustaceans trapped in the tangle when the tide recedes. Wrack lines teach us about the waters and the land, and how they are intertwined.

In the last issue, my first as editor, I shared that I was forming a focus group to hear ideas about taking this magazine to the next level. On March 2 a group of 13 people of diverse ages and backgrounds came to Avery Point and offered a wealth of great insights and suggestions, several of which are already being implemented. One of the subjects we talked about was whether to keep the name.

Some thought “Wreck Lines” sparked curiosity even in people unfamiliar with the term, while others thought it was too obscure to appeal to general readers. After some good discussion, we came to a consensus to keep the name – at least for the present – but explain it more thoroughly in print and with photographs. The newly designed masthead now has the name superimposed over a wrack line at Ocean Beach Park in New London, with a flock of brant swimming just offshore. The wrack line on this page is from Griswold Point in Old Lyme, where the Connecticut River meets Long Island Sound.

For this issue, a select segment of the hodgepodge found in wrack lines on the Connecticut coast is the focus. Specifically, that's the evidence of all the edibles our local waters provide. From newly abundant species like black sea bass and porgy to the oysters and clams that have been staples for centuries to kelp – an emerging market for aquaculture farmers – the Sound and offshore seas offer a variety of delicious and nutritious fare. With consumer interest in locally sourced foods growing, many involved with the seafood industry see an opportunity to better promote and educate people about Connecticut seafood. The articles in this issue – including a great selection of recipes in print and on the Connecticut Sea Grant website, www.seagrant.uconn.edu – will be, I hope, a valuable contribution to that effort.

After you read this issue, check out the nearest wrack line and pay a visit to your neighborhood fish market or seafood restaurant for some local fish and shellfish. Stay connected to the sea.



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On the cover: Stuffed flounder made with fillets from Connecticut fishermen are among the local seafood offerings for sale at Flanders Fish Market in East Lyme. Photo: Judy Benson





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WHAT IS CONNECTICUT SEA GRANT?

With 332 miles of shoreline and three major tidal rivers, Connecticut is a state defined by the intersection of land and sea. Connecticut Sea Grant, one of 33 Sea Grant programs across the country, helps residents make the most of our coastal resources and inland waterways. It addresses the challenges that come with living by the water or within a Long Island Sound watershed. A NOAA-state partnership based at UConn's Avery Point campus, Connecticut Sea Grant works with aquaculture farmers, fishermen and seafood purveyors to help their businesses prosper. It funds research essential to understanding and managing our changing coastal and inland environments. It provides communities and local leaders with the information they need to make better land and shoreline decisions that result in more resilient communities and healthier watersheds. It educates students as well as teachers and adults of all ages about the marine environment. Connected to experts and residents who live, work and recreate in the Sound and its watershed, it brings diverse interests together around a common purpose of working for mutually beneficial solutions to problems. Small in staff but big in impact, Connecticut Sea Grant is like a pilot boat that navigates the way for large vessels toward safe harbors. Since 1988, Connecticut Sea Grant has supported "Science Serving the Connecticut Coast."

Creative chefs, retailers and savvy customers seek more Connecticut seafood

By Ann Baldelli

When an older gentleman saw sea robin on the menu at the highly acclaimed Mystic Oyster Club last summer, he sought out owner Dan Meiser and berated him.

An avid fisherman, the customer accused the owner of selling garbage fish.

“So, I told him, ‘Order it and if you don’t like it I’ll pay for your meal,’” said Meiser.

“Well, the old-timer ordered the sea robin and he really enjoyed it,” said the restaurant owner. “He told me, ‘I wish all the years I’ve been fishing and throwing it back in that I’d kept it.’”

At Mystic Oyster Club, voted one of America’s top 101 restaurants by *The Daily Meal* in 2016, fresh fish and shellfish harvested from Long Island Sound is bought every single day. This is just one example of how the increasing demand for local foods is expanding beyond traditional farm-raised products to seafood. In Connecticut that means clams, oysters and fish from Long Island Sound or caught offshore and landed at commercial docks in Stonington and other shoreline towns.

At the Oyster Club, ask Chef James Wayman what is on the menu on a given night. That may prompt him to check his cell phone, to read his daily text from Sea Well Seafood wholesalers at the Stonington Town Dock to see what will be delivered in the afternoon.

“Tonight, it’s squid, fluke and whole whiting,” he said on a mid-winter day after checking his phone, explaining, “We don’t care what it is, what we ask from them is, ‘Tell us what are the two best and freshest fish that you have today.’”

There’s a pride at Oyster Club that comes with preparing locally sourced foods.

“The fact that we use and serve sea robin on the Oyster Club menu should be shocking because no one uses it except for bait,” said Meiser. “But really, it is one of the coolest presentations.”

Wayman was the chef who prepared the sea robin for the leery customer last summer, removing the scales, scoring

the sides, seasoning the fish in a marinade, dredging it in corn starch, and then flash-frying it.

“It’s delicious,” Wayman said. “And the wings are delicacies, too. They are like eating little potato chips.”

In the colder months, he does something very similar with whiting, a fish that is caught offshore and landed at Connecticut ports, that other chefs might be less inclined to put on their menus. Oftentimes, diners eating out will see salmon from Canada, tuna from Brazil, or tilapia from Costa Rica on the menus of other restaurants.

But Mystic Oyster Club prides itself on not just farm-to-table cuisine, but Long Island Sound-fish-and-shellfish-to-table, too. At various times, depending on the season, chefs there have prepared and served dogfish, Conger eel, moon snails, mackerel, and porgies, as well as the more standard fluke and flounder, bluefish, black fish, squid, oysters and clams.

“If it lives in the ocean, we will try it,” said Wayman.

Alene Whipple at Sea Well Seafood supplies some of what Wayman and Meiser serve. She and her husband, Ted, operate the wholesale market and lobster pound at the Town Dock and two – soon to be three – retail fish markets in the region.

“James’ sea robin is incredible,” said Whipple, explaining that many chefs shy away from the non-traditional fish in favor of the staples that have been on Connecticut menus for years. “But James, he thinks outside the box. He’s innovative, he’s one of a kind. I wish I had 10 of him, he’s that incredible.”

There are only a handful of other chefs willing to work with the less restaurant-menu-friendly-species from Long Island Sound, said Whipple, adding, “These are not farmed products they are working with, they’re wild, and that’s more difficult.”

At Cavey’s in Manchester, the Polish born chef George Janus was serving monkfish and black sea bass on his menu in late March.

“I suit the menu to the season,” he said. “Whatever is caught at that time of year.”

He serves the monkfish over spaetzle with his house-



"Tonight, it's squid, fluke and whole whiting. We don't care what it is, what we ask from them is, 'Tell us what are the two best and freshest fish that you have today.'"

– Mystic Oyster Club
Chef James Wayman



Scallop Crudo is one of the entrees served at the Mystic Oyster Club using locally caught seafood. Scallops are the most lucrative seafood landed in Connecticut among the top 12 species in volume and dollar value. To see a chart of the state's top dozen commercial species in 2016, visit: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/publications/wrack-lines/>
Photo: Mystic Oyster Club

cured pancetta and a sauce made of squid ink and lobster. The black sea bass is served nestled on a creamy mix of potatoes and fennel, almost like a risotto, and topped with black trumpet morel mushrooms.

Customers today are savvy about food, Janus said, noting that many of them watch the Food Network and are willing to try different things. They like to eat locally sourced foods and want to know where items come from, prompting Janus to list Stonington Black Bass and Stonington Red Shrimp (also called royal red shrimp) on Cavey's menu.

The red shrimp don't thrive in Long Island Sound but offshore, and are landed by Stonington Seafood Harvesters. The Bomster family runs the boats and business and is widely known for the shrimp and scallops they flash-freeze at sea and market from their business near the Town Dock in Stonington.

America today is a mix of cultures and ethnicities, and Janus said that diversity brings different and varied cuisines. Wayman, the chef at Mystic Oyster Club, agrees.

"What people think is good is cultural," he said. "They think it's weird here to serve dog fish, but in England, it is what they use in fish and chips."

When he visits Mexico, Wayman said he enjoys grasshopper, which is roasted over a wood fire and served smoky and crunchy.

"It is a curiosity for me and my (restaurant) team," he said, of the sea robin, whiting and porgies that they prepare. "That cultural identity about what's good and what's not good, if you adhere to that, you won't grow."

He makes a General Tso's dish with the Conger eel, substituting the usual chicken for eel, he said.

Jacques Pepin, the celebrity chef who has written more than 20 cookbooks, had a long-running column in the *New York Times*, contributes to *Food & Wine* magazine, has been a guest judge on the Bravo series *Top Chef*, and has hosted or appeared on many television food shows, makes his home in Madison. Nearby is

the local fish market where he shops, in Guilford.

He also receives fish and oysters from friends, who bring him their bounty, including bluefish, porgies (also called scup), blowfish, skate, and whiting. The porgies he fillets himself and uses to make ceviche, he said. At Star Fish Market in Guilford, he said he always asks for a recommendation.

"I say, 'What is very fresh, what do you have here that is very fresh today?'"

Sometimes he gets skate wings and fixes them with vinegar and capers, poaches them, and serves them with melted butter. When a friend brings him blackfish (also called tautog), or bluefish, he always enjoys it.

"People say bluefish is strong, but it is one of the best fish broiled or grilled. When it is very fresh, it is very good," he said.

A favorite summertime pastime for Pepin is something he did growing up as a boy in France. He and a friend will pull a rectangular net along the shoreline on an outgoing tide to catch whitebait – immature or tiny fish – that he guts by pressing on the belly. He then washes the fish, dips them in milk, dusts with flour, and fries them.



"It is a summer ritual," he said. "And you pay a price for those in France, from the Rhone River."

Like the guys at the Mystic Oyster Club, Pepin believes restaurants and chefs should give the bounty from Long Island Sound more of a chance.

"All the things that people throw back in the water, if they kept them, you'd have more fish than you know what to do with," Pepin said.

Fred Papp, the seafood manager at Stew Leonard's supermarket in Norwalk for the past 30 years, looks at the availability situation from a different perspective. He can get clams and oysters from Long

Island Sound, but not enough finfish for the busy supermarket.

Local for Papp is within a 500 to 600-mile radius and trucked in daily. On an average day, he boasts 26 kinds of fresh fish in his display cases and said Connecticut fishermen cannot supply the volume he needs.

“We go to the daily auction and it is whatever we can get local and big quantities that we can blow out,” he said. “They just don’t have the volume.”

He does get Copsps Island oysters from Norm Bloom & Son Oyster of Norwalk, what he calls “One of the best oysters I’ve ever eaten, perfect size, briny taste with a smooth finish.” And, he buys little neck clams from another local concern that he identified as Sea Star. Occasionally, he will buy a box of porgies and sell them whole, but for the most part, his inventory comes from elsewhere in New England and beyond, not Long Island Sound.

Several years ago, Matt Lariviere of Westbrook Lobster Restaurant and Bar closed his fish market in the face of competition from chain supermarkets and big box stores and used the space to enlarge his popular seafood restaurant.

But there are still a handful of things on his menu – all shellfish – that come from Long Island Sound: some of the oysters, littleneck clams and quahogs. He gets those from Connecticut Shellfish Company in Branford, but most everything else that he considers local comes to him from Rhode Island.

“We do advertise that our oysters and clams are out of Long Island Sound,” he said, and added, if he could he would buy fish from the Sound, too.

The suppliers he uses do not offer fish from Long Island Sound, but if they did, he said, he would buy and serve it.

In Willimantic at The Fish Market, owner Terry Hovey-Hussey said at various times of the year, she sells a variety



of fish from Long Island Sound, including fluke, flounder, black sea bass, blackfish, scup, monkfish, mackerel, squid and skate wings. She buys from Gambardella and Sea Well, both at the Stonington Town Dock. She also gets clams and oysters from purveyors along the Mystic River, both Noank Aquaculture and Aeros Cultured Oyster Co. In her bright, big, clean display case, she advertises both Ram Island and Mystic oysters, and local little neck and cherrystone clams.

She has a good variety in her prepared food line, but only her very popular stuffed quahogs, made with a secret recipe, use bounty from Long Island Sound. Customers like the convenience of tasty, readymade seafood, but the crab cakes, seafood salad and yellowfin tuna salad at The Fish Market are made with fish and shellfish from beyond local waters. But whatever she can get that’s local, she does.

“Customers come to us because we buy a lot of local,” she said, adding that both Bomster scallops and red shrimp, which she carries when available, are a big draw. She uses the scallops for a fried-scallop dinner on her take-out menu.

Several times each week a driver makes the run from Willimantic to Stonington, Mystic and Noank to buy fish and shellfish. In addition to her market, Hovey-Hussey sells at the year-round Ellington Farmers Market, and to a local café. At the farmers market, Hovey-Hussey educates shoppers about what she’s selling.

“They look for organic and they want to know where it comes from,” she said. “And I tell them, ‘That’s how I eat, I buy

as much local as I can. I like to buy local.”

Quotas and regulations may limit the availability of some fish, such as flounder, and that’s why Hovey-Hussey has other places, such as Boston, where she gets fish from. While most of the fish she’s buying in Boston will be from other states, some fish from her home state is available there.

“If I could get more fish out of Long Island Sound, I’d have no problem selling it,” said Whipple, of Sea Well Seafood wholesale operations. “I’m not an expert on the regulations, but I do hear they’re limited in what they can catch.”

In her seafood markets, Whipple uses what is available not just as fresh fillets or shellfish, but in ready-to-heat-and-serve, value-added products such as lobster bisque, conch salad, bacon wrapped scallops and seafood-stuffed lobster tails.

Other chefs and fishmongers across the state take advantage of the local catch, too. At the University of Connecticut, Robert Landolphi is the assistant director of culinary development, overseeing UConn’s catering operation. The university uses oysters and clams on raw bars that have been harvested from waters off Groton, Madison, Milford, and Norwalk by Noank Aquaculture Cooperative, Indian River Shellfish and Norm Bloom & Son. It buys much of its seafood from Hovey-Hussey’s fish market, Landolphi said. But when the university serves fish to its students, it buys off the docks in Boston to obtain the quantities it needs.

Catering for retirement parties, receptions or other special occasions is when Landolphi’s team will make a smoked bluefish dip, or maybe serve the scallops wrapped in pecan wood-smoked bacon with maple glaze and coarse black pepper on them. Oysters go on the raw bar and the black sea bass is used for ceviche.

Top photo: A sign hangs at The Fish Market in Willimantic, which sells a variety of local seafood. Photo: Ann Baldelli

At the Sheraton Hartford South Hotel, chef Jim Oswald, who is the first vice president of the Connecticut Chefs Association of the American Culinary Federation, said he would like to use more local seafood on his menus. One day in mid-winter, he asked his supplier, City Fish Market in Wethersfield, for a recommendation. That night, flounder was on the menu at the hotel restaurant, The Common House Kitchen & Bar.

“I want to become more involved and buy more fish from Long Island Sound, but it’s an education for all of us,” he said. “Chefs need to be educated on what’s available and how to prepare it, and it’s the same for the Connecticut consumer as well. We are all about local. People like to see that.”

Oswald said he would also like to do more with seaweed.

“I would love to work with kelp, but where will it come from and how will it get here?” he asked.

Walter Houlihan, the owner and chef at Water Street Café in Stonington, said when he can he buys from the day boats in town. But he lamented the declines in populations of lobsters and other species in the Sound, which he blamed on overuse of lawn chemicals.

“There’s not much out there,” he said.

When he can get eel, mackerel, or porgies, he takes them, prepares them, and they are delicious, but customers are reluctant to order them.

“No one wants to eat eel, I have to give it away,” he said. “And scup, I fry it whole with black beans or something Asian, or fix the fillets with onions or tomatoes, but only people who really know fish want to eat it.”

These days, Whipple said there are more markets, restaurants and chefs willing to try the less popular local species, and more consumers who want to try them.

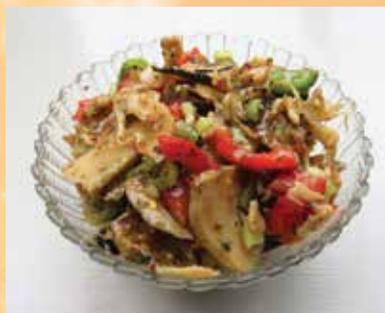
“Every chef is different and some don’t want to come out of their comfort zone,” she said. “But I’ll take anything that comes off a local boat and try to market it.”



Alene Whipple, owner with her husband Ted of Sea Well Seafood wholesale and retail markets in Stonington, shows some of the fresh local flounder that will be sold to local restaurants and retail stores. Photo: Judy Benson



Monkfish and stuffed lobster tails are among the local seafood products sold at Sea Well Seafood’s retail market in Pawcatuck. Photos: Ann Baldelli



Salad made with locally caught conch is one of the items for sale at Sea Well Seafood market in Pawcatuck. Photo: Ann Baldelli



Christopher Dodge, a volunteer for Eating With the Ecosystem, tallies the offerings at Flanders Fish Market during the nonprofit group’s first-ever “Market Blitz.” To read about the Market Blitz, visit: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/publications/wrack-lines/> Photo: Judy Benson

DEALERS' CHALLENGE: MATCHING SUPPLY, DEMAND FOR OLD FAVORITES, NEWLY PLENTIFUL FISH

By Judy Benson

In the refrigerated warehouse of her wholesale seafood company, Alene Whipple opened a box and used her bare hand to tunnel through the top layer of crushed ice and expose the silvery checkered fish underneath.

“These are my favorite,” said Whipple, who owns the Stonington-based Sea Well Seafood with her husband Ted, as she bent over the box and lifted out one of the fish.

In singling out black sea bass over the monkfish, clams, scallops, flounder and other species that filled the cold chamber

that day, Whipple endorsed a kind of fish newly deserving of unique local appeal. Once more common in the mid-Atlantic than Long Island Sound and southern New England, black sea bass are ending up in the holds of the state’s commercial fishing boats and on the hooks of recreational anglers as never before in recent memory, brought north by warming marine waters.

“Black sea bass are extremely abundant now, whereas seven or eight years ago the center of abundance was much farther south,” said Mark Alexander, who recently retired as director of marine fisheries at the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. “It’s become a very important fish for our charter and party boat industry.”

While commercial fishermen are bringing increasing numbers of black sea bass to market, he added, they are limited from catching more by quotas set by interstate regulators that haven’t kept pace with changing conditions.

“It would be nice to get a bigger quota,” said Alexander, noting that the commercial quota for black seabass stood at 41,204 pounds in 2017, while recreational landings that year topped 600,000 pounds. That mismatch, he said, indicates that fishery could be sustainably increased.

The condition of the black sea bass fishery is just one example of the seemingly contradictory forces at play in the world of Connecticut seafood. At a time of growing consumer demand for locally sourced foods, sellers and growers of fish and shellfish landed and harvested in Connecticut aren’t able to take full advantage, for a variety of reasons. At the same time, new abundance of species such as black sea bass and porgies – also called scup – isn’t meshing with outdated regulations, and demand for them from restaurant chefs and consumers hasn’t fully caught up either.

“We tried very hard last year to sell porgies, but it’s still a very hard sell,” said Chad Simoneaux, owner with his wife Camille of Gulf Shrimp Co., a Southington seafood wholesaler.

Porgies are usually sold and cooked whole because of their relatively small size, and diners used to uniform fillets can be reluctant to pick through the bones to find the mild white meat of a porgy.

“They’re a lot of work, even though they’re tasty,” said Ralph Pagano, vice president and general manager of Pagano’s Seafood, a Norwalk wholesaler.

Also, many home cooks just don’t know how to prepare them. Still, wholesalers aren’t giving up.

“You have to find the customer for porgies,” said Michael Dowie, general manager of Connecticut Shellfish Co., a

CONNECTICUT PRODUCTS	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
MOLLUSCAN SHELLFISH												
Hard Clams												
Hard Clams (shucked)												
Oysters												
Oysters (shucked)												
Sea Scallops												
Blue Mussels												
Conch / Whelk												
Squid												
CRUSTACEAN SHELLFISH												
American Lobster												
Blue Crab												
Jonah Crab												
Royal Red Shrimp												
SEA VEGETABLES												
Kelp (fresh)												
Kelp (frozen)												
FINFISH												
Blackfish / Tautog												
Bluefish												
Butterfish												
Codfish												
Dogfish, Smooth												
Dogfish, Spiny												
Flounder, Summer (Fluke)												
Flounder, Winter												
Flounder, Yellowtail												
Hake												
Herring												
Mackerel												
Monkfish												
Porgy / Scup												
Sea Bass, Black												
Shad												
Skate												
Whiting												

This chart, newly updated by Connecticut Sea Grant and the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection’s Marine Fisheries Division, shows the seasonal availability of local shellfish, seaweed and finfish.



Joan Rojas, fish counter manager at NSA Supermarket, prepares porgies (also called scup) for sale at the New London grocery store on Jan. 27. Photo: Judy Benson



Local oysters and clams are among the offerings for sale at the retail market at Pagano's Seafood in Norwalk. Photo: Judy Benson



Black sea bass like these at Sea Well Seafood are a newly abundant species being caught by Connecticut fishermen and starting to become popular with restaurant chefs. Photo: Judy Benson

Branford wholesaler. Markets with a large Hispanic customer base, for example, are good outlets for porgies, he said, because those cultures are more accustomed to eating them.

All four wholesalers interviewed for this article said they've had more success selling black sea bass than porgies, but are hoping that will change. Larger and easier to fillet than porgies, black seabass "are now being served in restaurants," Dowie noted.

Like the situation with those two species, the story of other fish and shellfish from Connecticut waters is also a mixed bag. The wholesalers say they try to sell as much local seafood to restaurants and retail stores as possible, but supplies and market realities aren't always compatible with that goal.

"We try to buy as much local seafood as possible," said Simoneaux of Gulf Shrimp Co., which even created its own "Connecticut Caught – Catch On" logo for its delivery trucks. "We try to promote anything from Connecticut, and we'll even give the name of the fishermen's boat so chefs can put it on their menus."

Like Simoneaux, Whipple said Sea Well buys directly from several Connecticut commercial boats, and tries to find markets for whatever they bring in – even if it's a relatively unknown species like sea robin.

"We try to buy local and sell local as much as possible, because it's fresher and cheaper, and keeps the money in our own community," Whipple said.

But much of the fish caught or landed in Connecticut waters – whether it's flounder, monkfish, whiting or skate – goes to big wholesale markets in Boston and New York City, where the smaller wholesalers must travel regularly to ensure they have a consistent supply for their customers. That means many of the fish caught and landed in Connecticut get shipped to Massachusetts or New York and offered for sale there, and then end up getting trucked back to a Connecticut wholesaler's warehouse.



Michael Dowie, general manager of the Connecticut Shellfish Co. in Branford, shows some of the Long Island Sound oysters his wholesale business will deliver to restaurants and retail markets. Photo: Judy Benson



A delivery truck from Connecticut Shellfish Co. brings a shipment of fresh porgies (scup), salmon heads, steamer clams, whole snapper and croakers to NSA Grocery in New London on Jan. 27. Photo: Judy Benson

“A lot of the product goes there before it comes back here,” said Simoneaux.

And since labeling at the big city markets can be inconsistent or use a general term like “New England” or “U.S.,” buyers can’t always tell whether the flounder or monkfish originated in their home state. And even if the labeling were clearer, wholesalers said they couldn’t rely on Connecticut to supply all the seafood their customers want. There is an international trade, with products coming from all corners of the world far outnumbering what’s available in state.

“We get mahi mahi and grouper and red snapper from dealers in Miami and Louisiana, and tilapia direct from Ecuador and salmon from Canada and Norway and Scotland,” said Pagano. “Salmon, both wild caught and farmed, is far and away our highest requested item, because of the consistency and stable pricing.”

Overall, about 10 to 35 percent of their sales are from Connecticut products, the wholesalers said. Some of the offerings, like Stonington red shrimp and winter flounder, are only available seasonally, though limited quantities are being frozen and offered for sale that way.

“Fish becomes a staple when there’s a consistent supply, when people can always find it,” said Alexander of DEEP. “When the supply is erratic, it affects the marketability of that fish.”

Most of the Connecticut seafood the wholesalers deliver consists of shellfish – clams, oysters and scallops. Scallops are brought in from boats that fish offshore that dock mainly in Stonington and New London. Clams and oysters are raised through aquaculture in designated beds in Long Island Sound leased by farmers from the state and from shoreline towns.

“Ninety percent of what we sell from Connecticut is clams and oysters,” Dowie said. “And I can’t get enough of those to meet the demand.” To meet some of the unanswered demand for local shellfish, Dowie’s company is expanding to grow its own oysters in a five-acre area of Branford harbor it will lease from the state.

Connecticut’s 45 licensed shellfish harvesters sell about \$30 million annually worth of clams and oysters. Much of that ends up getting sold out of state, where growers can demand a higher price.

“I sell to Rodney’s Oyster House in Toronto and at the Greenpoint fish market



Ralph Pagano, vice president and general manager of Pagano’s Seafood, lifts a whole Icelandic cod out of ice in the company’s warehouse. It is one of the many international products the Norwalk wholesaler offers along with Connecticut fish and shellfish. Photo: Judy Benson

in Brooklyn, and I have a couple of large restaurant accounts and a couple of other wholesale accounts,” said Steve Plant, owner with his wife Jill of Connecticut Cultivated Oysters in Stonington. “I have very stable demand.”

A former hedge fund manager who took up oyster farming 17 years ago, Plant sells about 250,000 oysters per year and is hoping to double that amount over the next few years.

“I’m trying to get to the next level of production, because the demand is there,” he said.

Tim Londregan, owner of the Niantic Bay Shellfish Farm, is also looking to expand his oyster production into beds in the Niantic River, just north of the areas in Niantic Bay where he now harvests about 250,000 oysters annually. In the river, he hopes to be growing seed oysters for other producers as well as bay scallops. He first got into shellfish aquaculture in 2013 working at the Fishers Island Oyster Farm, then began selling his own product in 2016.

“I got into this because I wanted to do something good for the environment,” said Londregan, referring to the benefits of shellfish aquaculture on improving water quality.

One of the state’s largest clam producers is Atlantic Clam Co., which is also seeing growing demand for its product. The company currently harvests from about 2,400 acres in Greenwich harbor, the farthest a 15-minute trip from where Atlantic Clam’s two pontoon boats are docked.

“We’re expanding into two beds in Stamford harbor,” said Ed Stilwagen, owner of Atlantic Clam since 1999. In 2017, he said, the company harvested and sold 13.5 million clams of three sizes – cherrystones, top necks and chowder clams, also called quahogs. Located on the New York border, much of the company’s product is sold in that state, although it also supplies fish markets, restaurants and wholesalers in the southwest corner of Connecticut.

With shellfish farmers like Plant, Londregan and Stilwagen looking to grow more clams and oysters, the outlook for an increasing supply of Connecticut shellfish looks promising.

But wholesalers like Whipple are also eager for an easing of the bottlenecks restricting the supply of the locally caught fish more of their customers want.

“I would love to buy more fish and shellfish from Long Island Sound, but it’s just not always available,” said Whipple. “We’ve always tried to promote local products over everything else, and I’ve definitely seen more customers asking for it over the last five to six years.”



Too few residents taking advantage of local seafood bounty

Survey is start of efforts to encourage more consumption

By Judy Benson

Whether it's flounder, oysters, porgy or kelp, more of the seafood grown or landed in Connecticut should be ending up on the dinner plates of state residents.

After all, it's healthy, safe and harvested under rules to prevent species from being overfished.

"I would really like the public to know that Connecticut seafood is safe, healthy and nutritious," said Tessa Getchis, aquaculture extension specialist at Connecticut Sea Grant and UConn Extension. "We have an abundance of seafood here, but we're not eating enough of it to get the health benefits."

Getchis and colleagues around the state are working to remedy that, by providing health information about Connecticut seafood and surveying residents about local seafood consumption.

Nationally, efforts such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch listing have heightened awareness and interest in seafood that's raised and caught responsibly. While Seafood Watch labeling identifies species consumers should seek from those they should avoid in the global fisheries market, Connecticut residents don't have to wonder about local fish and shellfish.

"Everything that's being harvested in Connecticut has a management plan that ensures it's sustainable," Getchis said.

Consumers can also be confident about the safety of all the seafood coming out of Long Island Sound, with just a few exceptions, said Brian Toal, epidemiologist with the state Department of Public Health. Three top-of-the-food chain species – striped bass, bluefish and weakfish – can have high levels of PCBs, a probable carcinogen, and should be avoided by pregnant women and children, and eaten only infrequently by others, he said.

"But all other fish from Long Island Sound are safe to eat," he said. "Everybody should eat fish."

Toal oversees the health department's "If I Catch It, Can I Eat It?" recreational anglers guide and its companion for consumers, the *Fish Consumption Advisory*. Each year, state environmental regulators take a research vessel into Long Island Sound and set trawl nets to survey marine life. Edible fish harvested in the trawl surveys are then tested for contaminants, Toal said, and all the samples have shown very low levels except bluefish, striped bass and weakfish. Apart from the warnings about the three species, the advisory recommends adults eat two meals per week of salt water fish and shellfish, in keeping with federal nutrition advice. Seafood is a good source of lean protein and heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. But only 15 percent of Connecticut residents are eating the recommended amount. Half of state residents eat just one seafood meal per week, and the other half eats even less.

Those are two of the early findings of the Connecticut Seafood Survey, a major initiative Getchis and Anoushka Concepcion, assistant aquaculture extension specialist at Connecticut Sea Grant, are undertaking with two colleagues at UConn Extension. The purpose is both to learn what people already know about Connecticut seafood – from traditional offerings like clams and oysters to emerging products like kelp – and their level of interest in expanding their seafood horizons. A portion of a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration paid for the survey.

"We want to improve our understanding about how seafood products can be marketed, and whether people are willing to pay more for Connecticut seafood versus, (for example) West Coast seafood, or more for wild caught versus farm raised," said John Bovay, assistant professor and extension economist in the UConn Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. Bovay worked with the three others on the survey team to write the 88 questions in the survey, which was taken by 1,746 residents representative of the state's age, gender and income

Everything that's being harvested in Connecticut has a management plan that ensures it's sustainable.

Tessa Getchis

SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents:

- 80%** EAT FISH AND SHELLFISH
- 90%** INDICATED MODERATE OR EXTREME CONFIDENCE IN CONNECTICUT SEAFOOD
- 23%** PREFER CONNECTICUT SEAFOOD PRODUCTS
- 13%** HARVEST THEIR OWN FISH OR SHELLFISH
- 35%** EAT SEAWEED
- 25%** INTERESTED IN TRYING SEAWEED PRODUCTS
- 15%** EAT TWO MEALS OR MORE OF SEAFOOD PER WEEK
- 50%** EAT ONE MEAL OF SEAFOOD PER WEEK



health guidelines for growers and assisting them with regulatory aspects, the survey provided a chance to help the farmers in a new way.

“Growers had questions about the potential markets, and whether consumers are interested in purchasing raw kelp or something that’s processed,” through dehydration or freezing, she said. “In the survey, we asked consumers whether they’ve ever tried seaweed, or would be interested in trying seaweed with a list of products, and what they’d be willing to pay.”

Bovay said the survey also provided information about how Connecticut’s seafood industry contributes to the state’s economy, and the health and environmental benefits of locally grown

and harvested products. Questions were then posed to determine whether that information had a positive influence.

“We may find that we can use those kinds of messages with consumers,” he said.

Ultimately, the findings could lead to a labeling campaign to clearly identify Connecticut seafood, or other “sensible marketing strategies” to respond to consumer interests and benefit seafood growers and harvesters, said Bovay.

Added Getchis: “Connecticut fishermen and farmers take great pride in offering fresh, safe and nutritious seafood. We are striving to expand on that message. We think that each and every seafood consumer should know how Connecticut seafood is grown and harvested and its cultural and economic importance.”

For Concepcion, the survey is relevant to her work with the state’s nascent seaweed farming industry, which is now growing kelp in a half dozen sites in the Sound. While her projects focus on providing the scientific data needed to set public

Find out about the warnings on three Long Island Sound fish species in the *Fish Consumption Advisory* from the Connecticut Department of Public Health by visiting: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/publications/wrack-lines/>

Long Island Sound cuisine extends beyond fish and shellfish to a trendy sea vegetable

By Ellen Johnson

You may have heard by now that “kelp is the new kale.” In fact, kelp’s benefits for health and the environment make it an even more impressive superfood than kale. Requiring neither freshwater nor fertilizer input, kelp is considered one of the most eco-friendly and nutritious foods on the market.

While Asian cultures have long enjoyed eating seaweed, it’s still a niche product in the United States. Scientists, farmers, and chefs in Connecticut are trying to change that.

Sugar kelp, commonly found in Long Island Sound, is a large brown seaweed with a long, ruffled blade resembling a lasagna noodle. It can survive freezing temperatures and strong wave action, and it grows quickly in the winter. It has a mild flavor that’s perfect for a variety of culinary applications. Coupled with the growing market for kelp, these qualities make sugar kelp the sea vegetable of choice for growers in Connecticut.



Seaweed farmer J.P. Vellotti samples some of the kelp dishes prepared by Chef Jeff Trombetta. Photo: Ellen Johnson

Kelp cultivation in Connecticut has been pioneered by Dr. Charles Yarish, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology and marine sciences at the University of Connecticut. Yarish has been studying seaweed biology for over three decades. Now, he applies his knowledge of seaweed physiology to develop methods for cultivating kelp in Long Island Sound and along the Atlantic coast, and he enthusiastically espouses the benefits of the sea vegetable for the environment, our health and our palates.

With funding from Connecticut Sea Grant and other sources, Yarish began researching kelp cultivation as a way to reduce nutrient pollution in Long Island Sound. The macroalgae takes up nitrogen, which enters the ocean from wastewater treatment plants and fertilizer runoff and contributes to blooms of harmful algae and low oxygen levels in the Sound.

Since then, his focus has shifted to creating a market for the sea vegetable by helping farmers get into the business and introducing kelp to American diets. Yarish and his team cultivate kelp in a lab at the UConn Stamford campus before giving them to kelp growers.

They provide growers with spools of string imbedded with juvenile kelp. It grows best in the cold waters of winter, so farmers put out the lines of juvenile kelp in late fall. In the spring, they pull up the lines now heavy with long, brown blades of the young kelp and harvest it for sale. Yarish has helped set up several local kelp farms, including the Thimble Island Ocean Farm in Branford.

Also in Branford is a kelp farm run by DJ King Lobsters. Another kelp farmer, J.P. Vellotti, tends kelp beds in Norwalk and Groton. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, kelp is being cultivated on 51 acres in Long Island Sound, and permits are pending for an additional 65 acres.

Bren Smith, owner of Thimble Island Ocean Farm, is a proponent of “vertical ocean farming,” a floating network of kelp and shellfish. He started a non-profit, Green-Wave, to train new farmers in this method. Once harvested and processed, the kelp is distributed to a small but increasing number of restaurants and local markets. Now, the biggest challenge for the kelp industry is getting Americans to eat it.

“There’s a knee-jerk reaction,” said Chef Jeff Trombetta, a professor of culinary arts at Norwalk Community College. “People think they won’t like it.”

But Vellotti remains optimistic.

“There’s enough demand among chefs,” he said. “Then [the chefs] will develop demand in the market.”

Trombetta is doing his part to turn people onto kelp by developing kelp recipes, partnering with local restaurants such as The Whelk in Westport, and teaching classes on processing and cooking kelp at the community college. He's come up with more than 100 recipes thus far, which will be featured in his forthcoming cookbook, *Kelping Today, Culinary Applications*. Some of the dishes include a kelp and Swiss cheese slider, kelp chowder, kelp-wrapped monkfish and a kelp mango smoothie. Even the stipe – the stem of the plant – can be pickled and made into relish.



Kelp stipes, the stem of the plant, can be pickled and made into relish. Photo: Ellen Johnson

“It’s versatile – think of it as another green vegetable,” he said.

Freshly harvested sugar kelp is deep brown in color, but when cooked, it transforms into an appealing shade of green. Vellotti harvests his kelp young, when it’s tender.

“The biggest difference in the product is the maturity,” he said. The tender baby kelp may command a higher market price than more mature kelp, he believes.

The sea vegetable has a unique savory flavor thanks to its natural glutamate enzymes. Glutamates enhance the flavor of other high-enzyme foods such as garlic and onions, Trombetta said. Kelp can be used fresh or rehydrated as a flavorful addition to soups, beans and salads.

Chef Kenneth Bergeron, founder of Middletown’s ION Restaurant and author of *Professional Vegetarian Cooking*, has been cooking with sea vegetables for 30 years. Some of his favorite ways to use kelp are in chowders and bisques, and as a replacement for anchovies.

“When I changed my diet (to vegetarian), I very much loved the flavor of the sea, but I didn’t want to eat the animals,” he said. “Sea vegetables gave me the avenue to enjoy those flavors.”

Kelp even works in desserts. UConn Marine Sciences graduate student Heidi Yeh, author of the cooking blog *Chez Yeh*, prepared kelp carrot cake and kelp candied with maple syrup and sesame seeds as an experiment in sustainable cooking for a marine conservation class. She purchased dried kelp online from Maine Coast Sea Vegetables. Both dishes were a hit with her colleagues at UConn Avery Point.

Since the market for kelp in Connecticut is still developing, you probably won’t find fresh, locally grown kelp at your local grocery store just yet. You can buy baby sugar kelp from DJ King Lobsters or visit Angie’s Seafood Market at Bridgeport Aquaculture School for some kelp noodles. Dried sea vegetables from Maine are available at many natural food stores and online. Fresh kelp can be used as-is, while dried kelp should be

rehydrated before use. Dried at a low temperature, it retains most of its beneficial nutrients.

There are plenty of reasons to jump on the kelp bandwagon besides its versatility in the kitchen. It’s a nutritional powerhouse, low in calories and loaded in beneficial nutrients. “You don’t need a lot of it to get the benefits,” said Dr. Simona Augytė, a postdoctoral researcher in Yarish’s lab and chief scientist at GreenWave.

Kelp is full of fiber, an important component of healthy diets. It contains high levels of important minerals, including iodine, calcium, magnesium and potassium. Like fiber, potassium is lacking in the diets of most Americans. Kelp provides vitamins A, B, C, E and K, as well as the micro-nutrients chromium, vanadium and boron. It is also rich in essential omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for brain function. Seaweed is also considered a safe source of omega-3s, free of mercury, PCBs and other toxins which can be found in some fish, according to physician and author Dr. Michael Greger.

Some may be concerned about pollutants in the kelp itself, since seaweeds take up the components of the water in which they grow. But kelp grown in Long Island Sound is highly regulated and safe to eat. Kelp can only be grown in waters that are clean and routinely monitored by the state, said Anoushka Concepcion, aquaculture extension specialist with Connecticut Sea Grant and UConn Extension Program.

Not only is kelp highly nutritious, but it is also good for the environment, since it doesn’t require the use of land, fresh water, fertilizer or pesticides. Beyond growing quickly with little input, kelp can restore the environment as it grows, according to studies by Jang K. Kim and Yarish. Since the seaweed takes up carbon dioxide, it has the potential to mitigate the effects of climate change and ocean acidification. It also absorbs nitrogen, which is beneficial because excessive amounts of this nutrient can trigger harmful algal blooms and hypoxia in the Sound in summer.

Thanks to Connecticut scientists, chefs and farmers, the kelp industry is growing. And you can help by requesting kelp at local restaurants, markets and farms, and adding it to your plate at home.

Connecticut-grown kelp is available at: **Angie’s Seafood Market at Bridgeport Regional Vocational Aquaculture School**

Thursdays 3 to 6 p.m.

60 St. Stephens Road, Bridgeport, CT 06605

For more information, send an email to:

angiesaqua@bridgeportps.net

THE JOY OF BEING A HUNTER- GATHERER OF THE SANDY, SALTY REALM

A first-time clammer learns the rewards of digging his own go beyond a delicious meal

By Bill Hanrahan



Bill Hanrahan shows off the yield from a morning of clamming in Stonington. Photo: Ellie Corey

This story starts with a rake; I am hoping it ends with a fork.

I am standing thigh deep in the middle of a cove in Stonington on a gray day in early April, channeling what feels like a Henry David Thoreau vibe. Henry, as you know, always wanted to live deliberately, and with waders on, rake in hand, and the water pushing past me on its way toward Fishers Island Sound, I am feeling deliberately optimistic.

This moment has been a long time coming. I am ready to plunge my rake's wide teeth into the water and scratch the sandy bottom.

I was asked over the winter if I would write a personal account of a virgin clamming experience in Connecticut's coastal waters and this is it. The waders may be loaners, but it was my own writer's obsession that led me on many a cold, dark winter night to ponder the clam.

The Indians, I learned, appreciated clams long before the white man arrived. I found a book in my library by the late Euell Gibbons. Euell may have been most famous for his 1970s Grape Nuts commercials, but he was a fine naturalist, and knew a lot about gathering his own food. He informed me that clams have many names, like littleneck, cherrystone, and the biggest, the "Quahog," "the white man's attempt to pronounce the Indian name for this valuable bivalve."

I read up on "bivalves," too. Simply put, the clam has two valves. It also has an incurrent and an excurrent siphon; one that takes in nutrients and another that expels waste.

Clams get to be clams after the release of eggs and sperm by adult clams in the warming tidal waters of spring, then they land and grow on the sandy bottom of a marsh or beach, places like the cove I'm standing in. If conditions are right, they feed on nutrients that flow in and out with the tides. Hidden in the sand, the tiny clams take in food and grow. Their result-

ing shells are a mix of protein, calcium carbonate and other cool minerals that make the shells whitish-grey, but also with purple parts.

"These purple parts of the Quahog shells furnished the Indians with the material from which they made the most valuable wampum," Gibbons wrote.

I plunge my rake into the water and strike hard at the sandy, mucky bottom.

Alongside me in the cove this day are two local experts on all things shellfish: Tessa Getchis, an aquaculture specialist with Connecticut Sea Grant, and Don Murphy, chairman of the Stonington Shellfish Commission. Tessa agreed to be my guide. Don is along at Tessa's invitation for added perspective. Following us in shallow water, waders on and camera at the ready, is Judy Benson, editor of *Wrack Lines*.

Judy had encouraged me to weave in details on the economic impact of recreational shellfishing in Connecticut. Fourteen shoreline towns have recreational harvest areas open to the public, and towns such as Madison, Guilford and Fairfield regularly hold clamming clinics and family days. Thousands of residents already know that with a little gumption, a lot of stick-to-it-iveness (and a permit), virtually anyone can be a hunter-gatherer in the modern world, bringing home delicious protein-rich food that's quite literally right under our toes.

"The economic impact is a lot bigger than most people think," said Robert "Bob" Pomeroy, a world-traveling aquaculture expert. I caught up with Bob by phone one cold winter morning as he drove to Cape Cod for his mom's 90th birthday. He was so happy to talk shellfish that I think he covered the Bourne Bridge and most of Route 6 before we hung up.

Bob grew up on Cape Cod, in West Yarmouth, clamming as a kid on the waters of Lewis Bay. His grandfather lived on the water and would give the kids nickels to dig clams while the old guy kicked back on the porch with an Irish whiskey. Later, he shucked the clams for the kids.



John Short, chairman of the Fairfield Shellfish Commission, shows different types of clamming rakes at Sasco Beach, one of the town's most popular clamming areas. Photo: Bill Hanrahan

“My mother, she’d steam them and we’d eat them as steamers,” he added. “My stepfather made clam chowder, and there’s nothing better in the world.”

Pomeroy now lives in Mystic and travels the globe as an aquaculture consultant, teaching fishermen in impoverished nations how to build sustainable food sources. In addition, as a Connecticut Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Specialist, Bob works with Tessa to really crunch the numbers.

There are, for example, approximately \$110,000 worth of recreational shell fishing permits sold each year in the state, but that’s only the most obvious number. “There’s a strong multiplier effect,” Bob said.

In other words, clambers spend their wampum. They need gear. They need rakes and baskets, swimwear, waders, ice, gas for the car. They need lunch. They rent boat slips and cottages on the shore.

“These are factors you don’t think of when you see someone out in a cove with a rake,” Bob said.

Today, I am that guy in the cove with the rake.

An osprey flies overhead. “He yells at me every time I sample,” Don says, referring to his diligent testing of these waters to ensure clamming is safe for the public.

“This area right here,” Don says, “is sampled at least twice a month, 12 months a year... We have 30 stations just along the coast of Stonington... There are hundreds and hundreds of stations on Long Island Sound.”

Don and Tessa are both hard at work, digging. “If you go in a circular motion like this,” Don explains, “you can sort of cover one area more thoroughly.”

My rake digs in. It releases a plume of fine sediment that floats and swirls and clouds the waters in front of me. I feel something! I wiggle and scratch the tines deeper, trying to get underneath it, just as I’d been taught.

I was taught, in fact, on Easter morning, by John Short, chairman of the Fairfield Shellfish Commission. We met at Sasco Beach, one of the town’s most popular clamming areas.

“I grew up down the road from the beach,” John said. “I was asked to be on the commission and it just clicked. I love it. I love being out there and doing all this, and, as for the clamming, I love to eat clams. It’s fun! It’s relaxing. You’re digging and you’re finding clams... the family, the kids. They leave the cellphones in the car... It’s amazing, when the kids go out, once they start hitting clams, they can’t stop digging – it’s the same with everyone, you hit a couple clams and you’re so into it. It’s like digging for gold.”

Like Don, John emphasized that eating clams is safe, because shellfishing is only allowed in places free

of heavy metals and other contaminants. “When you go to a restaurant you feel it must be safe, and where do you think those clams come from? These same waters,” he said.

The tide was too high on Easter for clamming, but John brought his rakes – including one called a “Chatham Scratcher” – and he dug holes in the sand to show me proper technique. “I’ll teach you the basics so when you go out with Tessa you won’t look like a fool.”

“I’d appreciate that!”

Back to the task at hand: There is a palpable sense of excitement, and there is a subtle but undeniable good-natured competitiveness to clamming; I can feel it.

I lift my rake and swoosh it through the water to wash off the sand and silt, ready to reveal my catch. I’ve done it! I’ve hauled up a beautiful, round... rock!? (I thought John said this wouldn’t happen in front of Tessa?)

I admit to a brief lull in my clamming adventure. For a moment, I don’t think I’m going to get any clams. I’d been nervous and excited when I got up in the morning, and Ellie, my wife, had promised, “If you bring home the clams, I’ll make linguini with clam sauce.” What if I let her down?



Bill Hanrahan had a successful first outing as a clammer on an April day in Stonington. Photo: Judy Benson



Lou Bull, an avid clammer and clerk at Hillyers Tackle Shop, shows some of the equipment sold along with clamming permits at the Waterford store. Photo: Bill Hanrahan

“Don’t worry, you’ll get some,” Tessa says. “We’ll get you enough for dinner.”

And we do! Before I know it, we’re all hitting clams, each of us pulling up at least a few big, fat beautiful clams. Quahogs! “Hogs,” as Don calls them, and with purple-edged shells just like Gibbons promised.

Tessa and Don are magnanimous, each giving me their catch to ensure I go home with plenty for a meal. The mesh bag attached to my waders is getting heavy with clams.

We pull up a few smaller clams, too. Don checks them with his clam ring. There are strict rules on size and catch limits out here, and if a clam fits through the ring, you have to throw it back.

Speaking of rules, if you try clamming, don’t forget: you absolutely must have a permit. I went to Hillyers Tackle Shop in Waterford to get mine, but was informed by the man behind the counter, Lou Bull, that you have to buy your permit in the town where you plan to shellfish. I was glad I stopped at Hillyers, though, because Lou is a charming man, and quite philosophical about clamming. He started going out in the late 1950s, with his grandfather.

“You’ve only got a certain amount of time on the tide,” he said. “You’re living in the moment. We are hunter gatherers and there’s a thrill to catching clams. They don’t run very fast, but it’s still a thrill to get ‘em.”

I eventually bought my permit at Don’s

Dock in Stonington – a different “Don” than the guy I’m talking to now in the cove.

“I grew up in New London and started clamming in the Thames River,” Don says. “We’d go out with no shoes and feel the clams with our toes. Then you’d dive down and pick up the clam... There’s a satisfaction to catching your own food. And there are a lot worse things than being out on the water. You could be sitting in front a computer.”

Don rarely catches his limit; just enough for a dinner or two. “I like to catch enough so I have some littlenecks or topnecks so I can put them on the grill and let them boil in their own juices a little bit, and eat those that way. The bigger clams, the cherrystones and the hogs – the quahogs – I shuck those and generally do either stuffies, that’s baked stuffed clams, or, linguini with clam sauce, which is just the best.”

Don encourages families to try clamming for all the obvious reasons, yet also for a slightly less obvious one: “The more people that do this, the more people who are paying attention to the water and, in my view, commercial and recreational shellfishing are powerful forces towards improving water quality.”

Tessa shares this same creed. She grew up clamming and fishing

these local waters; today, her two girls, ages 7 and 9, are just as enthusiastic. She tells me she loves her job as an extension educator with Sea Grant, based at UConn Avery Point, working with the shellfish industry, the regulators and also the public.

We are off the water now, sitting in Tessa’s car, when she sums it all up:



The mesh bag attached to Bill Hanrahan’s waders grew heavy with clams after an hour of digging. Photo: Judy Benson

“We want people to care about Long Island Sound and protect the Sound and learn about it, so one of the ways to do that is to get people out there, experiencing all the Sound has to offer,” she says. “It all starts with youth. My kids get so excited about it and what they learn when we’re out there... All of those questions they have, it’s such a good conversation starter for families and youth, and that’s where it all happens – when they start asking questions, and then they start to care, and then they want to take action, and then we have so many more people who are passionate advocates for our Sound and for our watersheds that lead to the Sound. That’s what I find really exciting.”

I’m home and our kitchen is in chaos. We are steaming open clams on the stove, linguini is boiling in a pot, and Ellie is stirring her “famous” sauce: lots of chopped garlic, parsley, olive oil, a little butter, white wine, fresh juice from the clams that are popping open. I use a sturdy ice cream spoon to pry the clam shells apart and we scoop out the meat, chopping it up and adding it to the simmering sauce.

My maiden clamming adventure is a reminder of how special it is right here, in the place we call home.

Bill Hanrahan

This whole day is making me philosophical, too. Years ago, Ellie and I had the good fortune to travel much of the United States in a Volkswagen, often camping in the most magnificent state and national parks. My maiden clamming adventure is a reminder of how special it is right here, in the place we call home. In a recent book I read called *The Nature Fix*, writer Florence

Williams dissects how our experiences outdoors in natural places can provide a host of health benefits, from lower blood pressure to enhanced moods. Williams could add a chapter on clamming.

We open a bottle of chardonnay and pour the wine. The linguini and the clams are on the plates, each with a “jaunty sprig of parsley” as Euell Gibbons recommends. We clink our glasses and toast the clam. And maybe it’s the wine or the endorphins after a long day, but I feel happy. I feel deliberate! I am thankful for the bounty that has gone from sea to table, cove to plate, rake to fork.

Like clams, we dig in.

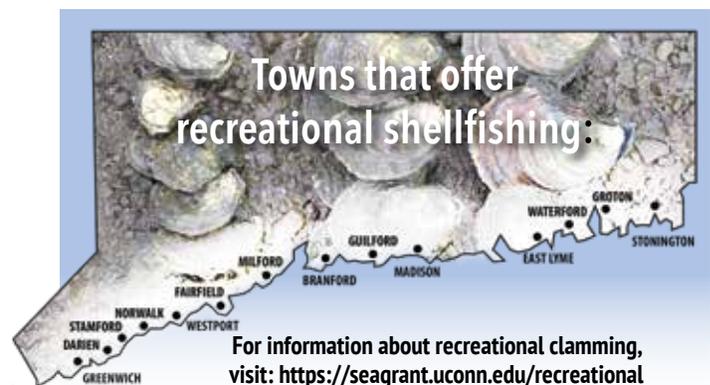


Linguini and Clam Sauce, a la Ellie

- 1 pound linguini, cooked al dente
- clams: As many – species and quantity – as you can get your hands on
- garlic: at least 8 or 10 cloves, chopped
- Flat-leaf (Italian) parsley: most of a bunch, large tough stems removed (set aside a couple of jaunty sprigs)
- olive oil: couple tablespoons
- ½ cup or so white wine: chardonnay or pinot grigio; whatever you’re drinking
- Cooking liquid from the clams: ½ cup or so
- butter: if you’re cooking for Bill Hanrahan
- Parmesan cheese
- red pepper flakes
- freshly ground black pepper

1. Sauté the garlic in olive oil until it’s soft, but not brown. Add wine and clam liquid (which you’ll get in the next step) to keep the garlic soft-not-brown. You want enough liquid to make the dish juicy, but not too much to drown the clams. Remove the pan from the heat.
2. In a separate pan, steam the clams in an inch or so of water until they open enough to manually pry them open; scoop out the meat and chop it up. We had difficulty opening some of the bigger clams, so let them steam longer in their shell; basically cooking them through during this step. Reserve about ½ cup of the clam cooking liquid for the sauce.
3. Add the chopped clams and the chopped parsley to the garlic mixture (and butter, if you’re Bill Hanrahan). Sauté for just a couple of minutes: you want the flavors to mesh, but for the parsley to stay green and the clams to stay firm.
4. Over a heaping helping of linguine, scoop plenty of the delicious mixture; be sure to include lots of liquid. Add a generous portion of Parmesan cheese; top with red pepper flakes and freshly ground pepper.
5. Garnish with a jaunty sprig of parsley... et voilà.

Serve with a fresh, zingy spinach salad, and a crusty baguette for sauce-sopping.



For information about recreational clamming, visit: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/recreational>

RECIPES *of the sea*



JAMES WAYMAN

Crispy Fried Whole Whiting with Thai Red Curry, Jasmine Rice

Serves 4

Marinade

- 4 whole whiting, gutted, scaled, gills removed
- ½ cup quality fish sauce such as Red Boat brand
- ½ cup fresh lime juice
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon ground black pepper

1. Put three angled vertical cuts into both sides of each fish, mix all ingredients together and pour over the fish in a non-reactive pan at least four hours prior to cooking and up to one day before. Make sure to massage some of the chunky bits into the cavity of the fish and into the cuts and refrigerate for at least four hours prior to cooking and up to one day.

Make the curry, up to a day before

- 4 guajillo chilies, seeded
- up to 10 Thai red chilies depending on how hot you would like it, seeding optional
- 1 stalk lemongrass
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons ginger root
- 1 small shallot
- ¼ teaspoon cumin
- ¼ teaspoon coriander
- 3 kaffir lime leaves (optional)
- ¼ cup neutral oil such as canola or grapeseed
- 3 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 can coconut milk

1. Roughly dice the chilies, lemongrass, garlic, ginger and shallot and transfer them to a blender. Add the cumin, coriander and ¼ cup of canola oil and blend to a paste.
2. Sauté paste on medium-low heat stirring constantly for 5 minutes after it starts to sizzle. Add coconut milk and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 15 minutes, put back in blender and blend till smooth, strain if necessary through a fine sieve. Finish curry with fish sauce and lime juice.
3. Cook the desired amount of jasmine rice. Remove fish from refrigerator and bring to room temperature before frying.
4. To cook fish you will need a Fry Daddy or a cast iron Dutch oven, enough canola or peanut oil at 350 degrees to cover the fish. Cook them two at a time until golden brown and take out and drain on paper towels.
5. Serve fish with jasmine rice, curry sauce underneath and a generous squeeze of lime on top.

James Wayman is the executive chef at the Mystic Oyster Club.

ROBERT LANDOLPHI

Our Smoked Bluefish Paté

Yields 16 ounces

- ½ pound smoked bluefish, skin discarded, bloodline removed
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped shallot
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise
- 3 tablespoons of drained horseradish
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives
- salt and pepper to taste.

Accompaniment: toasts or crackers

1. Place bluefish fillets in a food processor and pulse until chopped fine.
2. Combine bluefish with remaining ingredients and blend with a spoon until smooth.
3. Paté can be made 5 days ahead and chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature to soften (about 1 hour) before serving.

Robert Landolphi is the assistant director of culinary development at the University of Connecticut, overseeing UConn's catering operation.

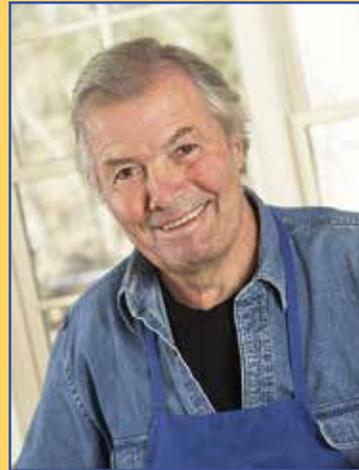


Photo: Tom Hopkins

JACQUES PEPIN

Jacques Pepin's Fish Tacos

(from his book "A Grandfather's Lessons - In the Kitchen with Shorey")

Serves: 2

These tacos make a great lunch. One fillet of fish is enough for two large tacos. The fish could be grilled, but in this recipe it is seared in a very hot dry pan (cast iron is ideal). The tortillas are quickly heated in the microwave oven at the last moment.

- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons peanut oil
- 1 fillet black sea bass (about 6 ounces)
- 2 flour tortillas, about 8 inches across

Garnishes

- ½ cup shredded iceberg lettuce
 - ½ cup hot salsa (store-bought or homemade)
 - ½ cup sliced mild onion, such as Vidalia or Maui
 - ½ cup loosely packed fresh cilantro leaves
 - 1 large jalapeño pepper, seeded and coarsely chopped (about 3 tablespoons)
1. Heat a large sturdy skillet, preferably cast iron, until very hot. Salt, pepper, and oil the fish fillet and place it in the hot skillet. Cook for about 1½ minutes on each side, until seared but still slightly under-cooked in the center.
 2. Meanwhile, wrap the tortillas in paper towels and microwave them for 1 minute.
 3. Cut the fish fillet in half, place one half on each tortilla, and add the garnishes to your liking. Wrap and enjoy.

Jacques Pepin of Madison, an internationally known chef and television personality, is the author of numerous cookbooks.



LETICIA MOREINOS SCHWARTZ

Brazilian Fish Stew

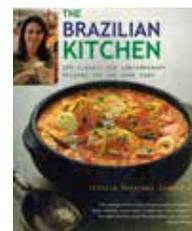
Moqueca de Peixe (Pronounced Moh-ke-kah)

Serves: 4

- 1 ¼ pound sea bass
- 1 scallion (white and green parts) chopped (about ¼ cup)
- 1 small onion, sliced (about 1/3 cup)
- 1 small piece fresh ginger, peeled and finely chopped (about 1/8 cup)
- 4 large cloves of garlic, minced (about 2 tablespoons)
- 5 tablespoons palm oil (dendê oil)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 4 tablespoons freshly chopped cilantro
- ½ cup sliced green bell pepper, about half a pepper
- 1/3 cup sliced yellow bell pepper, about one third of a pepper
- 1 ¼ cups fish stock
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 3 small stalks of canned or jarred hearts of palm, drained and diced, about 1/3 cup
- 2 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and sliced, about 1 cup

1. Cut the fish into big chunks, about 2 inches wide and place in a plastic zippered bag.
2. Prepare the marinade for the fish: in a bowl, mix together half of the scallion, half of the onion, half of the ginger, and half of the garlic. Add 2 tablespoons of the dendê oil, all the olive oil and half of the cilantro. Pour this marinade into the plastic zippered bag and massage it around the fish until it is well covered. Remove all air from the plastic bag and seal it well. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours.
3. Take the fish out of the refrigerator at least 30 minutes before using. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
4. Place 3 tablespoons of dendê oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the remaining scallion, onion and green and yellow peppers, and cook until soft, about 3 minutes.
5. Add the remaining ginger and garlic and mix well. Cook for another minute or until hot.
6. Add the fish stock and let it come to a full boil.
7. Add the coconut milk and tomato paste, and let it come to a full boil again, then lower the heat to simmer the sauce nice and gently.
8. In the meantime, roast the fish in the oven by spreading the fish with the marinade, in a gratin dish. Pour the lemon juice on top and season lightly with salt and pepper.
9. Roast in the oven until it's almost done, about 10 to 12 minutes. You will finish cooking the fish by braising in the sauce.
10. Carefully transfer each chunk of fish into the pan with the sauce. Pour in any remaining juices. Braise the fish in the sauce over low heat with the pan covered, until the fish is soft and tender, about 5 to 8 minutes.
11. Uncover the pan, add the hearts of palm and tomatoes, and let get it hot.
12. Taste the sauce then season with salt and pepper; sprinkle with the remaining fresh cilantro. Serve it over rice.

Leticia Moreinos Schwartz of Greenwich (www.chefleticia.com) authored the award-winning cookbooks *"The Brazilian Kitchen"* and *"My Rio de Janeiro."* Extensively featured in media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Today Show*, she also serves as the spokeswoman for Merck's campaign promoting healthy cooking. During the 2016 Rio Olympics, she was NBC's food correspondent as ambassador of Brazilian cuisine.



JEFF TROMBETTA

Grilled Kelp Wrapped Potato Slices

Serves: 5 portions; 15 pieces (3 pcs per portion)

- 1 ¾ pounds (approximately 3-4) Russet (Idaho) Potatoes
- 6 ounces whole blanched kelp leaves
salt and pepper to taste
- ½ cup virgin olive oil

1. Slice potatoes lengthwise into ¼-inch slices
2. Season potatoes with salt and pepper
3. Cut kelp leaves into appropriate lengths to wrap around potatoes slices width-wise to cover potatoes 1 ½ to 2 times (about 5 inch lengths)
4. Brush with olive oil and grill, turning regularly until potatoes are knife-tender.

Jeff Trombetta is a professor of culinary arts at Norwalk Community College. He has developed more than 100 recipes using kelp, which will be featured in his forthcoming cookbook, *Helping Today, Culinary Applications*.



SALLY MARAVENTANO

Linguine Fra Diavolo Spicy Seafood Marinara over Linguine

Servings: 10 - 12 as first course

- 4 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil
 - 3 large cloves of garlic, minced
Peperoncino - crushed red pepper flakes to taste (optional)
 - 1 cup of dry white wine
 - 1 35-ounce can of Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano), coarsely crushed
 - 1 teaspoon of oregano
5 to 6 fresh basil leaves, slivered
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
 - 2 pounds of linguine pasta or spaghetti
 - 2 pounds of cockles or 1 dozen littleneck clams
 - 2 pounds of large shrimp, shelled, cleaned and de-veined
 - 1 pound of sea scallops
 - 4 tablespoons of flat leaf Italian parsley, minced
1. To clean the littleneck clams or cockles, soak them in 3 quarts of water to which ¼ cup of sea salt has been added for several hours or overnight. Before using, drain and scrub well under running water. Discard any that are not tightly closed.
 2. In a wide saucepan or skillet large enough to hold the sauce and the clams, gently sauté the garlic and in the olive oil over medium-low heat just until it is translucent, NOT brown.
 3. Add the crushed tomatoes, wine, oregano, basil leaves and salt and pepper and crushed red pepper flakes, if using, to taste. Bring to a boil.
 4. Return the pan to a low flame and simmer for 15 – 20 minutes. Add the clams.
 5. Meanwhile, bring 6 quarts of salted water to a boil and cook the linguine according to package directions, about 7 to 10 minutes, until “al dente”. Drain and reserve 1 cup of the pasta cooking water.
 6. As the clams begin to open, add the shrimp and scallops to the marinara sauce and simmer for an additional 5 to 6 minutes. Be careful not to overcook the seafood. If the sauce is too thick, add some of the pasta water.
 7. Add the pasta to the seafood sauce, give a few turns of the pepper mill and toss well, adding additional pasta water if necessary. Serve in individual bowls, garnishing with parsley before serving.

Traditionally in Italy grated cheese is not served with seafood sauces.

Sally Maraventano is the owner of Cucina Casalina, (<http://www.cucinacasalinga.com/>) a regional Italian cooking school in Wilton.

Many thanks to our Connecticut chefs who contributed their recipes using local seafood.

Go to: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/publications/wrack-lines/> for these additional recipes from our chef contributors:

Silvia Baldini:

- Clams, Mussels, White Beans and Chorizo Sauce
- Easy Grilled Oysters
- Stovetop Clambake

Kenneth Bergeron:

- Maple-Glazed Kelp, Carrots, Onions and Rutabagas

Robert Landolphi:

- Pan Seared Sea Scallops topped with Applewood Bacon with Green Pea Risotto

Sally Maraventano:

- Insalata di Mare Sott'Olio alle Erbe (Seafood Marinated in Herbed Oil)

Leticia Moreinos Schwartz:

- Shrimp Moqueca
- Scallops with Caipirinha Risotto
- Striped Bass with Cashew Soy Butter Sauce

Jeff Trombetta:

- Dried Kelp and Apple Bites
- Cod and Kelp Crepes
- Sliced Sweet Potatoes and Kelp (plain or on a sandwich)
- Kelp-filled Squid Tubes

SILVIA BALDINI

Oven-Baked Whole Fish

Servings: 8

- 4 1 to 1 ¼ pound whole fish—porgy (scup), black sea bass or Branzino (European sea bass)
- 2 large lemons, sliced
- 1 whole lemon, juiced
- 4 sprigs rosemary
- 8 bay leaves
- 8 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- bunch parsley
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 medium red onion, sliced
- 1 bunch thyme

1. Preheat the oven to 425° and line a large tray with baking paper, then scatter lemon slices, rosemary, sliced red onion, garlic, and bay leaves on it.
2. Season the fish cavities with salt and stuff 2 lemon rounds, a bay leaf, some of the thyme, a garlic clove, parsley and 1 rosemary sprig in each. Season the fish with salt and pepper and drizzle with olive oil and the lemon juice.
3. Roast the fish in the oven for about 25 minutes, until just cooked through.

Silvia Baldini of New Canaan (www.silviabaldini.com) established the creative food group Strawberry & Sage, has appeared on the Food Network and other TV shows, competed on “Chopped Champions,” is the lead chef on FabFitFun.com and is launching the online store The Secret Ingredient Girls with partner Alina Lawrence.

BIOS



Ann Baldelli is a freelance writer who retired after a 40-year career as a reporter and editor at *The Day*, southeastern Connecticut's leading newspaper. She is an avid boater who has lived near Long Island Sound all of her life, and the beneficiary of fish and shellfish caught by her husband and sons. A graduate of St. Michael's College in Vermont, she has a degree in journalism.



Ellen Johnson graduated in May 2018 with a master's degree in marine sciences from the University of Connecticut. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry with a minor in environmental studies at the University of Redlands in southern California. Ellen studies the intersection of marine science and digital media with the goal of teaching people about ocean conservation. She writes about marine science and conservation on social media and on her blog, CurrentSea.



After graduating from UConn with a journalism degree, **Bill Hanrahan** worked for many years as a reporter, both for *The Day* and the *New Haven Register*. He and his wife, Ellie Corey, quit their respective jobs in 2001 and spent nearly eight years traveling the country in a Volkswagen. Today, he works at Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in public relations and is an avid book collector, specializing in American literature and natural history.



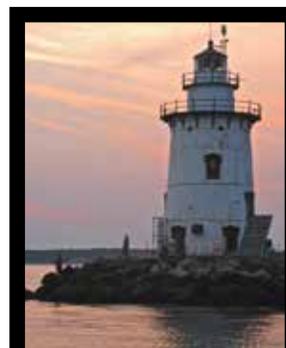
Judy Benson is the communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant and editor of *Wrack Lines*, having previously worked for many years covering health and the environment at *The Day*. Exploring the tidal marshes, islands and natural beaches of Long Island Sound by kayak and on foot is one of her favorite pursuits. She earned both her undergraduate degree in journalism and her Master of Science degree in natural resources from UConn.

Connecticut Sea Grant will be celebrating its 30th anniversary year starting in August.

Send us your photos to help us celebrate!



Photo: Judy Preston



1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-place winners will be published in the Fall/Winter 2018-19 issue of *Wrack Lines*, with the photographers credited.

ACCEPTING ENTRIES

Aug. 20 through Sept. 30

SUBJECT: Connecticut waterways, from the rivers and streams that flow into Long Island Sound to the estuary itself. Send us photos of how you play, work and enjoy the natural beauty of our shores, or of the wildlife that inhabit these special places.

DEADLINES: *No entries received before Aug. 20 or after Sept. 30 will be considered.*

ELIGIBILITY: Professional photographers are not eligible.

SUBMISSION FORMATS:

DIGITAL OR 4 X 6 PRINTS

DIGITAL PHOTOS should be emailed as low-resolution versions (no more than 90 KB), but must be available in a high-resolution version (at least 1 MB) that will be requested to be sent through Dropbox if the photo is chosen for print publication.

PRINTS: must also be available as high-resolution versions if chosen

Entries can be **emailed** to:
judy.benson@uconn.edu

or **mailed** to:
Connecticut Sea Grant, Attn. Judy Benson
University of Connecticut
1080 Shennecossett Road, Groton CT 06340.

The submissions must be the original work of the person sending the entry. Please include your full name, mailing address, telephone number and email address so we can notify you if your entry is selected. No entries will be returned.

PERMISSIONS: Connecticut Sea Grant will need permission to use photos in *Wrack Lines* and other educational publications, with appropriate credit.

Please check our website, www.seagrants.uconn.edu, for news of other 30th anniversary events, including a Sept. 7 research forum we will be sponsoring at UConn Avery Point.

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Commercial fishing boats dock in New London harbor. Photo: Nancy Balcom



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