Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative
Minutes of Wednesday December 8, 2011 2:00pm-4:00pm RIDEM, Room 300
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Hannah Mellon, Farm Fresh RI
Sanne Kine-Jensen, Writer
Dr. Jeremy Collie, URI, Graduate School of Oceanography
Rich Fuka, President, Rhode Island Fishermen's Alliance
Tim Faulkner, ECO RI News
Rick Bellavance, President of RIPCBA
Stephen Arnold, Wild Rhody, LLC
Caitlin Thomas, Deputy Director, State Policy
Nancy Sullivan, Legislative Clerk
Peter Martin, State Representative
Colleen Coyne, Seafood Program Coordinator, Food Export NE
David Spencer, Newport Lobster Shack
Peg Parker, Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation

Director Coit called the meeting to order by welcoming all and asked each participant to state who they are and their role in the Collaborative / Council. Director Coit noted that both the Collaborative and the Council are meeting together, as requested at the first meeting.

Director Coit then provided an overview the Collaborative / Council's responsibilities and goals, which includes submission of a report to the General Assembly by April 30, 2012 to reflect and inform about what we learned through this process, and importantly, through the advice of the council. Director Coit again asked if anyone wanted to serve as the lead person for the Advisory Council. With none offered, the meeting continued. Posters were up on the walls for attendees to select subcommittee work topics to move the project areas forward and report on at next meeting. Four main topics are: Marketing, Research, Funding, and Expansion. Rayna Santoro collected list of attendee selections at end of meeting.

Announcements

- Branding issue was discussed last meeting. Further discussion needed.
- Good News: $30,000 grant received on behalf of our RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative from van Beuren Charitable Foundation. Many thanks to Ken Ayars for championing this grant for the Collaborative.
- Food Day was great success. Food Assessment report was given to attendees at the meeting and included in minutes attachment.
- Katherine Farrington and Andrea McHugh, Newport VCB, reported on the potential for Dec 21 article by Gail Ciampa in Projo "Feast of Seven Fishes". Local help from Ross Pearsall on available fish during this season and chefs preparing recipes of each of seven dishes. Interview with North Kingstown family about Feast will be included in article. Chefs to provide recipes. Gerry Bertrand asked that recipes on index size glossy cards be distributed to supermarkets, restaurants in advance of article. Barry Costa-Pierce suggested the recipe cards also have interesting facts about the fish used in recipes and connections to Rhode Island.
- Director Coit suggested that the article highlight our marketing collaborative efforts underway.

- Director Coit spoke to Dr Fine, DOH, about recommendations for best health practices.

Presentations

1. Barry Costa Pierce, URI Sea Grant, presented the highlights and importance of the 2011 Ronald C. Baird Sea Grant Science symposium held June 26-28, 2011, hosted by Johnson & Wales University at the Harborside J&W Providence Campus, Rhode Island Sea Grant, and the University of Rhode Island. The symposium brought together an international group of scientists, chefs, the seafood industry, and others to share perspectives on topics such as sourcing sustainable seafood, consumer preferences, and health. Participants got to prepare—and taste—sustainable seafood dishes under the guidance of chefs at the Johnson & Wales University campus in Providence. Next meeting will be . . . . The new You Tube video highlights the symposium and its distinguished participating guests and speakers and their perspectives. Online at: http://www.youtube.com/user/RISeaGrant#p/a/u/0/vCe1v9QP_Nc.

   Information about the Baird Symposium, including presentations, is also online at URI SEA GRANT website at: http://seagrant.gso.uri.edu/baird/2011_seafood.html

2. Next speaker was Gerard Bertrand who had been asked to present on market branding lessons learned from Agriculture in Rhode Island, and from other states. Most other states had different logos for seafood initiatives. Ken Ayars had previously mentioned a "certification" seal for Rhode Island's seafood products. Gerard Bertrand had market survey data that showed local Alaskan State name recognition on menus was 70% known ordered and recognized for quality by 68%. Survey from Rutgers in 2006 suggested that most consumers knew little about fish and how to prepare. Consumers took most seafood purchase advice from store clerk at point of purchase. Important point for educating our consumers. Most Task Force and Advisory Council members present did not want to recommend another survey they thought sufficient information is available to make decisions regarding a marketing campaign. Attendees were vocal about getting some campaign underway ASAP. Certification for local product was also a topic presented more by Dr. Jeremy Collie, URI.

3. Third presenter was Dr. Jeremy Collie, URI GSO, regarding national certification and assessing the benefits and implications of certification for Rhode Island fisheries. Dr. Collie and team at URI have a fisheries certification study underway that focuses on conservation and economic benefits of fishery certifications. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is the well-established certification program and the globally recognized ecolabel for fish species quality and standards for sustainability, management systems, and quality/integrity of products.

This project is being funded by RI Sea Grant. Handout presented by Dr. Collie is included with these minutes.

The next phase of the meeting was questions, answers and comments regarding all topics and issues presented or discussed today. Following is a summary of comments:

- Imported fish products even if traveled many miles, may still be priced lower than our local fish. Consumers typically gravitate to lower priced seafood.
- A brand or Branding strategy is paramount in getting movement on our RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative initiative.
- Studies are plentiful and not critical at this time.
- National certification is a key issue, it may pose a cost prohibitive barrier for many businesses, processors and fishers. However, not having this certification, may be a barrier to international trade. Food Export USA Northeast spokesperson and URI GSO believe it to be important for future expansion. Food Export USA offers programs for assistance on branding and overseas marketing. Webinars available.
- Lori Pervanik, URI Food and Nutrition representative, said that URI Sea Grant has done national consumer surveys; consumers have little knowledge about fish, fish quality, and, know little to nothing about how to cook fish. More education to consumers is needed. Certification is important but a separate issue for the industry. Not critical for consumers now (unless fish is not available).
- Traceability – chain of origin of the fish, and, buyer trust/confidence -- need to know where the fish came from is important to the consumers. Get consumers excited about local seafood. The shorter the chain the higher the quality. They want to know the story.
- Safeway retail markets will only now buy certified seafood products per Dr. Jeremy Collie. Certification (or lack of it) may become barriers to expansion for the industry.
- Steve Arnold trademarked logo of Wild Rhody is well recognized. Derek Wagner stated that certification established a level of high quality. A local branded name is needed soon. It establishes a sense of pride, community. Regarding certification, chain of custody also requires all parties along the chain (including restaurants) to be certified.
- Ann Cook still raises questions about the definition of "Rhode Island fish". What is local? What should RI choose to represent as its certification?
- Bill Silkes hoped that our branding and certification statement will have a "sustainability component" in its branding designation. "Establish a swagger for RI".
- Farm Fresh RI and others have made some progress with Farmers on regulatory standards at their markets and market mobile. Still more needed. Transparency of how fish moves from boat to plate is the issue. MSC certification is challenging, and we are not there yet.
- Local is not just Rhode Island. State is too small to take the brand to be recognized beyond our borders. And, pricing remains an issue since consumer

knowledge is low on seafood products and therefore, consumers gravitate to lower priced fish even if it is from out of state.

- David Preble stated that the Collaborative's number one issue should be branding our name locally. Eco-system management and MSC certification still needs to result over time and Mr. Preble supports Dr Collie's study on MSC or other certification processes. However, this would not be ready to use locally at this time.
- Before certification we need local logo branding. Perhaps regional certification could be interim step before national certification and less costly to industry and businesses. Certification not essentially important to consumers when buying seafood but some information and local brand recognition factors about local catch would perhaps entice more local fish sales to consumers (within reasonable pricing differentials).
- Barry Costa-Pierce stated that even Alaskan Seafood Marketing Board can't afford all of the certifications. They have decided to adopt "FAO guidelines". Rhode Island should assess the idea of adopting FAO (Food Agriculture Organization) guidelines as our interim measure.
- John DelGado, Dave's marketplace, echoed the sentiment that MSC certification is a big plus, but consumer knowledge about seafood is still critical factor that needs more attention.
- Some processors complain about the MSC certification and all its paperwork.
- Rhode Island Food Policy is looking at the whole system as we do business in the State. Seafood system harvesting, processing and sales included.
- Many Collaborative members liked the idea of FAO guidelines. Needs more consideration. FOA standards can help us get into the world stage. Recognized as a fact that pressure definitely will be on the industry to get certification for any export sales activities in the future. Colleen Coyne, Food Export USA, stated that MSC does work in the global marketplace but is costly for states and countries. NOAA has a fish watch site which shows our U.S. science-based fisheries and sustainability plans for fisheries.
- Rhode Island should be part of branding and recognize and somehow connect with and support our New England Fisheries.
- Hannah Mellion states, regional is important but our immediate focus and economics should be to help our "local community".
- Bob Ballou stated that he sees us paving a path towards: local, healthy, sustainable harvests, ecological standards, socially acceptable standards for fisheries and aquaculture.
- Larry Mouradjian, RIDEM, suggests we keep it simple. Basically need Rhode Island certified fresh food. Perhaps DOH – RI certified fresh.
- Andrea McHugh states that educating the consumer is a priority as is to brand ourselves.
- Dr. Collie, URI GSO, regarding his research project thanked the group for their comments. MSC is the largest and sets the standards for many other organizations. We cannot ignore this fact. Wholesalers are now facing these pressures for certification. Retail is coming. MSC seems cumbersome as the

problem is defining "sustainable". Need some standards to satisfy the consumer demands and questions.

- Kelly Mahoney, DOA, Purchasing. Under the state purchasing system, the State buys $7MM in food products and struggles with the definition of "local". Need some focus to come about for RI Brands within our geographic boundaries. Price is important too, and by law, is used by Purchasing with lowest price as a primary factor.
- Hirotsugu Uchida, Assistant Professor, URI, states that mothers want to feed their child with the healthiest foods. Private benefit comes from "healthy food" and "safety", not so much about sustainability. Certification should come later. Teach people how to cook Perhaps have fishers or chefs help teach caregivers how to properly cook and choose healthy foods and fish.
- Mike Walker, EDC. Good quality is primary. Sustainability may not be the first purchase decision. Policy may not be the key to sales. Let's not get hung up on the industry standards and stay with essential consumer needs.
- Education can happen at all 46 Farmers Markets during summer and at 4 indoor winter farmers markets facilities.

Director Janet Coit thanked everyone for another lively interactive discussion and summarized what she saw as key messages:

1. Need for "Rhode Island fresh" branding.
2. Local and healthy caught products first and foremost and, hold back for now on the sustainability.
3. No fishing boats have caught fish outside of the ABC (allowable biological catch) box, so that could be a possible standard.
4. Fear that Rhode Island could be locked out from global markets if we lack a certification process.
5. This group and existing practices can ensure traceability and sustainability.

Director Janet Coit also asked that group in attendance take a minute to select areas of interest for assignments on subcommittees: Funding, Expansion, Research and Marketing.

Will need feedback and make some assignments. Meet sometime in January within your subcommittees; report back at next meeting in February. EDC might help with branding?

Meeting adjourned at 4:15pm.

If you have any other suggestions, please contact Rayna Santoro at rayna.santoro@dem.ri.gov