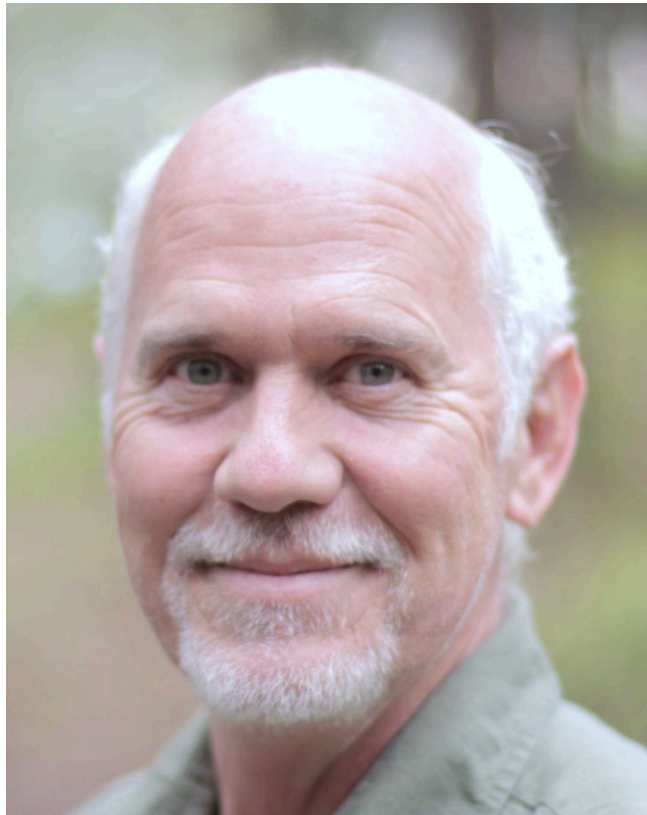


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## In My View: Fresh fish fillets forever!

January 8, 2024



Back in May there was a news splash about a Sea to Market project that proposed to install a fish fillet station for local fishermen to use to sell their catch directly to local customers. The project had just received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for \$276,776 to develop the fillet station.

They had hoped to be open in June 2023 pending approval of building permits and health permits. As can be expected with new ventures, unanticipated complications with permitting delayed the project. Today I can provide an update on the status of Sea to Market, but first I will review the background details.

I found an excellent overview of this project in the Wild Rivers Outpost (5/15/23). Here are a few excerpts.

### Sea to Market

Millions of pounds of crab, shrimp and ground fish cross Crescent City's docks each year, yet it's a rare Del Norter who can bring that local seafood home. Josh Mims and the Community Food Council hopes to change that. Mims is the project manager of the Community Food Council's Sea to Market Project.

With help from a grant from NOAA, Mims and the Community Food Council are creating a small-scale processing facility that will allow local fishermen to sell directly to the consumer at the Crescent City Harbor.

“Most of our seafood that’s caught in Crescent City is shipped north to Washington and Oregon to be processed and packaged,” said Mims. “(It’s then) re-sold throughout all of the 50 states.”

### Local Supply

The Sea to Market Project will house three fillet stations inside a 40-foot cargo container and fishermen can reserve a time slot, process their catch and sell it directly to the consumer.

Mims said the Community Food Council is also working on a website to put the consumer in direct contact with the fishermen. “They can pre-order the fish and deliver it to the consumer,” he said. “It’s really shortening that supply chain — kind of cutting out the middle man.”

Mims said local restaurants are already on board, including Schmidt’s House of Jambalaya, SeaQuake Brewing and Port O’Pints.

### Permit Snag

This project was all set to go and then hit a snag with the food and health safety permits. During the permitting process two additional challenges emerged. In the interest of consumer safety, the health codes are very strict when it relates to handling and processing fish.

The first issue was that the available bathrooms did not meet the code requirements for a commercial kitchen. The project needed a separate bathroom that meets the health code. The second impediment was that the fish fillets could not be sold from the same building as the processing. They needed a separate building for this.

Another unresolved issue was developing a permitted plan to manage the fish waste. You might think that this would be discouraging for a project proponent. Rather than despair, Josh Mims and the Community Food Council pressed ahead and overcame these problems.

### A New Grant

In November 2023, the California Coastal Conservancy awarded a grant to the Family Resource Center of the Redwoods and Community Food Council for the Sea to Market Project. This grant will fund the missing pieces of the permit puzzle. The staff report recommending the grant stated their justification for the grant.

“Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize disbursement of up to \$260,100 to the Family Resource Center of the Redwoods to construct a direct-to-consumer fish processing and sales facility, consisting of a fillet station, restroom, and storefront, at the Crescent City Harbor in Del Norte County.”

“The project will support commercial fishing by providing new economic opportunities for small scale fishermen who operate out of the Crescent City Harbor; it will also increase access to local fish for residents

in Del Norte County. The facility is designed to allow for immediate relocation to adapt to rising sea levels.”

### Rules Followed

“Small-scale fishermen who often have an unused quota of certain species do not have any way to bring those fish to market locally. To do so they need a small-scale processing facility that meets the California Retail Food Code, the temporary Food Facility Code, and the local public health requirements for retail processing.”

“Fishermen who want to use the facility will also need to be trained in safe food handling. Once these requirements are met, fishermen will be able to sell to local restaurants or directly to consumers.”

It was not easy for Josh Mims and the Community Food Council to persist in developing this project. But it is always better to try to follow the rules. In the long run, cutting corners does not always save time.

### Partnerships

The Sea to Market Project is a great example of the progress that can be made through partnerships. The Crescent City Harbor District has been supportive of this project. They have leased the land and provided necessary utilities for the facilities.

The Family Resource Center of the Redwoods is non-profit group that has served our local families for years. One of their programs is the Community Food Council which is working to build a local food system that provides healthy, culturally appropriate food to all families in Del Norte and Tribal Lands.

Sea to Market is a project of the Community Food Council (CFC), which plans to form a separate new non-profit entity to better focus on their mission. Sea to Market will complement an existing CFC program called “Fresh Catch” where they purchase fresh local catch for food banks, food pantries and meal services.

A private partner is also critical to the success of this project.

Josh Mims has found a local dairy farmer who will be permitted to apply fish fertilizer to his fields. This will benefit the soil and assist local fishing businesses.

### Forward Progress

It gives me hope for our community when I see how tenacious some people are to achieve their mission. This partnership between the Harbor District, Family Resource Center of the Redwoods, the Community Food Council, a local dairy farmer and local fishermen is a collaboration that will most likely succeed.

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