

**Seafood System Innovations:  
Ensuring a Future for Fishing Enterprises**  
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and  
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*Learning From Our Farmer Friends*

Thirty-five of our nation's fifty states have coastline lands that support commercial fishing enterprises, but coastal development is eradicating waterfront access for fishermen. Seafood imports are also devastating local businesses.

Coastal community-driven efforts in North Carolina have adapted agricultural innovations to increase demand, open new markets, and strengthen family-run fishing businesses. On-the-ground, effective efforts include:

- **Commercial Fishing Co-operative:** Fish houses (also called "ice houses") are vital links in the seafood system value chain, providing year-round docks for commercial fishing boats, and a place to land, pack in ice, and distribute the fresh catch. A local fish house is critical to preserve catch — even one degree above required temperatures and the whole catch is wasted — and to save time and fuel getting to an out-of-town processing center.

Since fish houses are also waterfront property, they are rapidly disappearing as vacation homes, rental condos and other developments spring up in coastal communities. Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association (OWWA) secured grant funds from the NC Rural Center and the Golden LEAF Foundation to purchase the business and upgrade the last remaining fish house on Ocracoke Island. Now, 41 family-run fishing operations land their catch at the fish house, which then adds value to the fresh seafood (filleting fish, heading and de-veining shrimp, processing oysters and crabs, etc.), and sell the seafood to local restaurants. Ocracoke Seafood Company, the for-profit arm of OWWA, sells fresh and value-added seafood to residents and visitors; net revenues are cooperatively shared among fishers and re-invested in oyster restoration and facility maintenance.

**Project Summary**

**Location:** Outer Banks, NC

**Project Partners**

- Ocracoke Fish House
- Ocracoke Working Watermen's Association
- Saltwater Connections
- Local and Regional Catch Groups, Core Sound Seafood and Walking Fish

**Strategy:** Protect fish house infrastructure, establish local fishing co-op with local processing capacity; build markets through community supported fisheries; provide consumer education about imports and access.

**Resourceful Communities** has served as intermediary and partner, facilitating planning, asset mapping and organizational development to support project partners and helping to leverage multiple funders' investments.

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**THE CONSERVATION FUND**





## Building Capacity

Resourceful Communities Creating New Economies Fund small grants program, established in 2001, has invested more than \$2 million in innovative “triple bottom line” projects that promote sustainable economic development, social justice and environmental stewardship.

Nearly half of these grants have supported agriculture-related community-based projects in North Carolina.

As both an intermediary and funder, our approach — a combination of training, organizational assistance and small grants — is strengthening food systems and producing real change.

### Local. Innovative. Growing.

In addition to securing a local fish house, local fishermen have focused on building new markets and consumer awareness.

- **Community-Supported Fisheries (CSFs):** There is a critical need for higher-value markets for fresh seafood in inland communities, so Walking Fish and Core Sound Seafood have adapted the community-supported agriculture model to create new markets for North Carolina’s seafood industry. CSF shares are sold to consumers in inland urban areas, and then fresh seafood is caught, packed and / or value-added and delivered to the shareholders within 36 hours.

Lessons are being learned along the way: When it became clear that many consumers don’t know how to prepare soft-shell crabs, for example, Walking Fish developed a video on how to cook the crabs and distributed the video with the shares. It’s a win-win: fishers’ income is increased and urban residents have fresh, healthy seafood.

- **Consumer Education (Catch Groups):** Residents and visitors frequently assume that all seafood purchased in coastal restaurants and retail stores is local when, in fact, the largest percentage is imported seafood because consumers want inexpensive foods. Trade restrictions require that less than 1% of imported seafood be inspected (visually only), and US fishers are held to significantly higher health and environmental standards. Carteret Catch, Ocracoke Fresh, Outer Banks Catch and Brunswick Catch are working to increase consumer and restaurateur awareness about North Carolina seafood, the species that are available during various seasons, and the health benefits of local, fresh seafood.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Saltwater Connections is a regional initiative funded by the NC Rural Center, which is engaging coastal communities in planning for, and investing in, the future of the seafood industry and sustainable coastal development. Dozens of communities are mapping their natural/cultural/historic assets, and identifying job and small business development opportunities to strengthen the economy, protect the environment, and sustain coastal livelihoods.



#### Caught, Cooked and Plated Locally

Collective to Inspire Change. Besides its overall, the water table has made generations of successful fishermen who earn their livelihood bringing fresh, seasonal seafood to your table. At 85 you have 85% of all seafood served nationally is imported from other countries. As a consumer, you deserve nothing less than the best, healthiest and most delicious seafood available. Ask for Outer Banks Catch by name.

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