**Friendly Dragon’s Den**

The Friendly Dragon’s Den was an opportunity for organizations to pitch a business problem or concern to large groups that would work together to try to come up with solutions. Dave and I pitched the following issue:

“Trash Fish”: How do we change the perceived value of certain undesirable and/or undervalued fish species (such as bycatch species) to ensure that fishers get a fair price?

Our Dragon’s Den was comprised of Dave Adler and myself (Justin Cantafio) of the Ecology Action Centre, as well as the following individuals:

* Jenna Stoner, Sustainable Seafood Campaign Manager, Living Oceans Society
* Abra Brynne, Program Manager, Food Secure Canada
* Jessica Thorton, Director of Operations, Local Food Plus

The following notes were taken during the discussion that ensued:

*Issues*

* Undervalued fish are caught alongside targeted species.
* There is a difference in perceived value between certain species.
  + For example, the amount of bait, fuel, and effort is the same for catching hake as it is for haddock or cod, yet hake fetches roughly one tenth the value of haddock and cod on the market.
  + Another bycatch species is the long-lived “redfish”, which is often valued as low as $0.10/lb on markets, even though it is delicious and adaptable in the kitchen, and frequently caught as bycatch.
  + Mackerel is a plentiful and tasty fish, but its market price is so low that it is generally dumped into the market as bait fish.
* We need to shift the mindset of fishermen (to not treat undervalued species as bait and therefore land it in better condition) in addition to shifting the mindset of consumers, chefs, etc. (to view undervalued species in a different light).
* Fighting back: Slow Fish
  + A network of chefs, consumers, etc. who are starting to “get it”.
  + But how do we convince average consumers to pay more for what they’re already used to paying little for?
* Jessica: Push for awareness of what is available
  + Capitalize on the reality that not every fish is available all of the time.
  + Promote multiple selling factors: taste, availability, sustainability, etc.
* Jenna: How do we storify these fish species?
  + We need to ensure that we don’t just add another added dimension to the overwhelming and often convoluted fisheries discourse that can confuse consumers.
* Dave: Geographic differences
  + Larger certification initiatives may certify a whole species as “red”, “yellow”, “threatened”, “endangered”, etc., however this may be done for an entire species.
  + Sub-populations of certain species (i.e. Bay of Fundy cod) and/or specific fisheries (bottom hook and line vs. bottom trawling) may actually be healthy.
  + It is important to look at things at smaller scales.
* Moving the market: redirecting underutilized fish (such as herring, which is now caught specifically for bait, or for mink farms, etc.)
  + How do we make this a “food” fish again?

*Sources of solutions*

* Aggregation: Off the Hook is an example of a “brand” of fish, but we actually catch a variety of fish with various parameters.
  + These fish fetch different prices per pound on market/commodity markets.
  + But Off the Hook members pay the same price for haddock, cod, hake, etc.
  + There is trust in the brand.
  + Consumers are happy to pay for the umbrella of values that constitute Off the Hook fish.
* Build individual brands/relationships
  + This can take the worrying out of it for the consumer.
  + They can look for a brand, rather than the confusion of species-specific purchasing and/or broad scale certifications.
* Moving away from species-specific purchasing
  + Example: Whale’s Bone in Ottawa.
  + They will buy a “boat run”: they’ll purchase whatever a boat brings in for a particular day, then they let chefs and other individuals in their purchasing network know what they have as supply.
* Abra: variance & storifying
  + Market variance can actually be seen as a plus.
  + Buyers are growing increasingly interested in storified products.
  + Putting a farmer’s face on a product was once unheard of.
  + We need to move beyond food phobia (don’t eat this, or this, or this, etc.) and promote a more food friendly culture.
    - Focus on storytelling rather than naysaying.
* Jessica: Local Food Plus has its own certification model taking these tenets into account.
  + It offers farmer profiles, in addition to a robust, points-based system, with hired investigators and external reviewers.
* Dave: example
  + With Off the Hook, there will often be a positive customer appreciation response to a missed order due to bad weather.
  + Customers are actually happy to learn that the fishermen they have gotten to know did not risk their lives to catch fish.
  + In other words, customers are actually happy to know they won’t receive fish that week, because they are signed on to not just a weekly share of fish, but they are part of a greater story; a community.
* Food skills: resurgence of learning how to cook, preserve, etc.
  + Food preservation skills have been disappearing for decades, however there has been a recent resurgence in regaining and retaining these skills (i.e. food skills clinics).
  + This opens up the possibility for food businesses such as Off the Hook to work with social organizations such as food banks.
* Margin-conscious institutions
  + This could be a good venue to direct low value fish.
  + Fish that are fetching $0.10/lb on the market could be sold for less than traditional haddock and cod, yet still fetch significantly higher prices.
  + Example: Going from $0.10/lb to $2.00/lb for herring (a significant price boost) would still be less than the $4-5/lb that institutions pay for haddock and cod.
* Distinguishability of CSFs and CSAs
  + While CSAs don’t always work well in rural areas, CSF’s can.
  + Fish is caught in rural, coastal communities, but currently fish is expedited straight to market.

*Putting this into models/strategies*

* Local/regional hubs for seafood need to be centrally aggregated (physically or virtually).
  + This will allow for regional distribution or locally sourced products.
  + Hard to schedule a hard temporal distribution loop for scattered communities and scattered (variable) catches, so aggregating can make it easier to create consistent product flows.
  + Nova Scotia’s geography is prohibitive to local distribution so we need to consolidate.
* Regional food systems.
  + Regional food systems have shorter supply chains with fewer links.
  + Allows us to regain sovereign control over our food systems in our places.
  + Shared goal: rebuilding our regional food systems starting with relationships.
* Institutional procurement.
  + Low price margins may be a source for selling low-value fish at higher margins.
  + We can quantify their markets to work with them.

That’s all I’ve put together for the Friendly Dragon’s Den. If you have any further additions to the conversation, questions, concerns, etc. please feel free to email me.