



WHAT DOES SHELLFISHING MEAN TO YOU?

**A COMPILATION OF INTERVIEWS WITH CAPE COD PEOPLE INVOLVED
IN SHELLFISHING**

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INTRODUCTION

The Barnstable County Cooperative Extension contracted with Coastal Resource Specialists to interview people on the Cape involved with shellfish in some capacity. The objective was to get a sense from the people being interviewed – shellfish officers, growers, and commercial fishermen - of what shellfish means to them. All were asked the same question at the start of the interview: “What does shellfishing, the act of shellfishing or the ability to harvest shellfish mean to you?” From that starting point, questions centered on how the individual got into shellfishing and then what they thought the future of shellfishing might be.

While not written in quotes, the material came directly from the interviewees.

The interviews represent geographic, age, gender, and experience diversity as well as shellfish species diversity. One group not contacted directly but an important component of the Cape community was the Wampanoag Native American tribe. We would like to add one or two interviews from to this group to complete the user groups.

Some major themes emerged from this work but one theme that came through loudly is that shellfishing remains an important component of the Cape economy and culture and those who are involved are concerned about its continued presence on the Cape.

Barbara and Pat Woodbury – Growers - Wellfleet

For this husband and wife team, working with shellfish is a dream come true. They both love being out on the flats observing what is going on in the wild. They get a chance to see miniscule changes from time to time and season to season. Growing something is satisfying and wonderful – from seed to a food product. It is something that is sought after and valued in the outside world. They found it special on all levels and found they could make a living at it.

They have been in the shellfish aquaculture business for 20 years and have been able to raise a family, build a house, and a business, all on oysters and quahaugs. It is physically demanding but they feel that it gives the kids a sense of self reliance. It has shown them what you can do with hard work to provide something useful for others but also what they can do for themselves. Being self-employed provides motivation to teach a great lesson for young people to show grit and determination to want to do something and just go out and do it.

The kids thought their life was not unusual and it was how everyone made s a living. They wouldn't bank on their kids stepping into their shoes and continuing with aquaculture. They are more into being musicians now but even with those careers, they need to be self-motivated to do it and that lesson is there.

They got their start 21 years ago in 1986. Their oldest had just been born. They had scratched quahaugs and picked oysters in Wellfleet but had mostly stuck with quahaugs. They were in graduate school heading for careers down the academic route as PhDs. They were majoring in ecology and invertebrate zoology at the University of Chicago. They had met at the University of FL while doing masters work in zoology. They had done some work in Jamaica and Puget Sound, and with their interest in marine science, the emphasis was on the marine world, basically as field scientists. They had read about

aquaculture here and came to visit some friends. They realized they had nothing to lose, being graduate students with a baby, if they stayed for a while.

Barbara had a major epiphany after being in Wellfleet for a short time. She felt she had moved from an intellectual community at the university to isolation and thought she would miss the intellectual stimulation but discovered that she liked it in Wellfleet and was happy. She said when you make a major change like that you need to know that you are a part of it.

They shared a grant with Dick Taylor and later put their name on the grant too. They built the business through the wholesale route. Working with Dick Taylor was a gift – he was a classic old timer who could do anything – he could turn a Chevy into a Ford. They built their own house – something they wouldn't have been able to do with a conventional job. They now have one full time employee and 2-4 others depending on the season, who are like family too – they eat meals together. With the kids and friends helping out, it works for them.

They sell directly to restaurants in Boston and have developed a particular clientele, working often with chefs who care about the food they are cooking and serving and can relate to how it is produced. They drive to Boston about twice a week and also ship via overnight delivery with Fed Ex and UPS selling outside the Boston area. They ship to NY and DC and oddly, to the Iron River in Michigan. They have a website – it is slow in the winter – and they have some retail customers. They are not part of the consortium of growers in Wellfleet – they developed their own thing and like to do everything themselves.

They recognize that not many couples could do what they do and stay together but they got to know each other working in the field together on research projects and work well together. They have 5 acres now for their grant and they share it with Linda Taylor,

Dick's widow. They cultivate and rotate as suitable so that probably 2 acres are under cultivation at any one time.

They use mesh cages and ADPI bags, inventing the design they use themselves. They line them with mosquito netting. They are small enough to handle and each contains about 3300 animals. Most of the stock is purchased through ARC. They field plant in the fall and cover them with netting. Because they are located near Indian Neck on the inside of the jetty, they have not had a problem with ice moving the stock or netting. They harvest two times per week with bull rakes.

The state farm bill supports sustainable agriculture and you can't find anything much more sustainable food than shellfish. They are not adding fish as food like fish culture, and with shellfish, there is a huge conversion of plants to biomass and then, as the shellfish is harvested, nitrogen is taken out of the system. Aquaculture is an amazingly green industry. It is also sustainable for small families – and for communities that in turn, sustain the small families raising shellfish. Although they acknowledged the importance of people who come to Cape Cod to visit and then to build second homes, the aquaculturist needs cleaner water than they do.

When asked if they had trouble with people on the shore watching them do their work, they said the NIMBY attitude is ridiculous in Wellfleet because shellfishing is such a traditional use of the shore. Since things shook out in Wellfleet (referring to a court case several years ago), there has not been the same level of acrimony. The problem before had a lot to do with personalities – some folks thought they owned the land under the water, claiming riparian rights but found out it wasn't theirs. Others sold land they did have to the fishermen, effectively stopping the legal process.

Now they have an oyster festival that draws 10,000 people coming from all over. But many people at the festival don't realize what it takes to get those oysters there for the festival or to have in the marketplace. People generally don't think about where food

comes from. If people are intrigued, they ask questions but if not, they seem to be intimidated to not ask questions.

The Boston chefs they work with sometimes have harvest dinners featuring the seafood they raise. They attend the Boston Seafood Show but are not exhibitors. They promote it as being local and fresh. Some people don't care about that and are willing to buy seafood raised in China but regardless of what it costs, it is still coming from China, not locally grown. To the Woodburys it is all a question of scale and they are focused on a small scale operation that they can deal with themselves. It fits their lifestyle and their lifestyle is more important to them than making tons and tons of money.

