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Sharing in the sea's bounty

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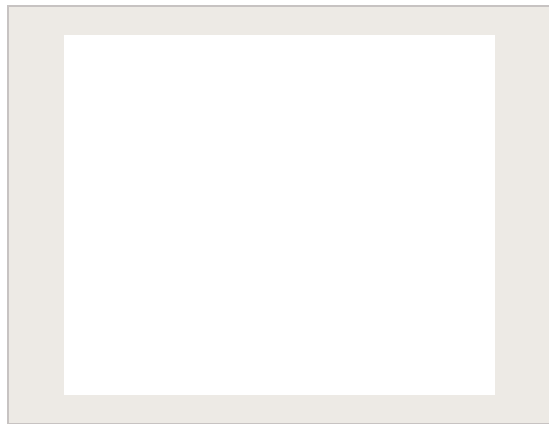
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BY ANDREA WEIGL - STAFF WRITER

My husband, Matt Ehlers, declared last year that he would eat only North Carolina seafood.

He was inspired by Paul Greenberg's book, "Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food," which made him decide that we should support only local, small-scale fishermen or farm-raised fisheries in the state.

This left me, the primary shopper and meal planner in our household, in a lurch. Matt's stance meant no more buy-one, get-two bags of frozen shrimp or pretty much any fish on sale at the grocery store. Without the ease of fitting seafood purchases into the grocery store routine, I would have to seek out local fish at Capital Seafood Market or Earps Seafood Market, the two markets closest to our house. I didn't do a good job adjusting my routine, and our fish consumption, never great to begin with, was reduced to nothing.



Only when Matt drove to Thompson's Prawn Farm in Cedar Grove last fall to buy 4 pounds of those shrimp-like crustaceans did we make any progress.

This spring, he came up with a solution: a community-supported-fishery share, or CSF. It is similar to community-supported agriculture, or CSA, in which you pay a local farmer for a weekly share of his or her crops during the growing season. With a CSF, you pay for a portion of seafood caught by

North Carolina fishermen and delivered to the Triangle from the coast.

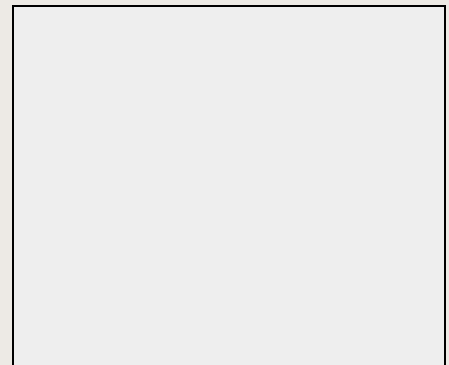
We signed up for a 10-week share with Core Sound Seafood, an operation run by Allison and Eddie Willis, a fourth-generation fisherman on Harkers Island. For \$225, we get 2 pounds of seafood a week for 10 weeks. That's \$11.25 a pound, which is more than you would pay on sale at a grocery store, but we're making it work within our \$75 weekly grocery budget. Every Thursday, Matt goes to a parking lot in Raleigh and picks up our fish, driven by the Willises from the coast.

In six weeks, he has brought home clams, shrimp, king mackerel, flounder and crabmeat.

This has driven home once again that food tastes best when it's in season, and we've lost sight of that because everything is available almost anytime at grocery stores. Though we seem tuned in to the concept of seasonal fruits and vegetables, I had not adjusted to the idea that there are seasons for shrimp and crab, too.

That's not an uncommon oversight, says Barry Nash, a seafood marketing specialist with N.C. Sea Grant, a research, education and outreach organization at N.C. State University that monitors coastal issues. Nash says many people have the same reaction: "Not only did they not know seafood is seasonal, they also don't know what it looks like before processing."

I'm learning that lesson each week when my husband comes home with our fish share. It has been so much fun. We like to cook together, and this special fish delivery basically creates a date night. We're forced to be creative in the kitchen and inspired by whatever the fishermen have caught for us.



COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED-FISHERY PROGRAMS

A community-supported fishery is similar to community-supported agriculture, in which you pay a local farmer for a weekly share of crops during the growing season. With a CSF, you pay for a portion of seafood caught by North Carolina fishermen and delivered from the coast to the Triangle each week.

Three serve the Triangle

Walking Fish will be offering a summer share with delivery in Raleigh and Durham. For information, go to www.walking-fish.org and sign up for email. Or send a note to info@walking-fish.org.

Core Sound Seafood still has shares available and offers delivery to Carrboro, Raleigh and Durham. The next 10-week share will be this fall. For more information, go to www.coresoundseafood.org.

Locals Seafood offers the chance to order the seafood you want and delivers to four farmers markets in Raleigh. For more information, go to localsseafood.com/.

To know when seafood is in season, check out this calendar from N.C. Sea Grant: ncseagrant.org/s/availability.



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Last week, we fried up soft-shell crabs and served them with a lemon caper mayonnaise. As we sat down to dinner, I realized that this "limitation" was in fact inspiring us to be more creative cooks.

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Coastal Catch

Don't be fooled by the word "local". There is no way to tell that it is local unless you catch it yourself. Commercial fishermen are starving and they will tell a lie to gain a dollar. My recommendation is to buy what looks good, not what somebody brings you because you think it is local. For example: Have the shrimp been de-headed? If so, then you're probably not getting fresh local shrimp.

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bmack

Allowing 30% of the \$75 weekly budget for two pounds of overpriced seafood seems extremely extravagant to me.

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ThePRGuy

What you call "overpriced" is healthier and tastes better than what's available in most grocery stores. Plus it supports local fishermen instead of wholesalers who ship in cheap seafood from overseas.

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bmack

"Healthier and tastes better?" That's debatable and is sometimes an excuse used by those who boost their ego by letting others know they paid the top price for something. I'm sure the local fishermen appreciate your support.

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