

# UC San Diego

## Capstone Projects

### Title

Connection Through Food, Fish and Culture: Benefits Gained for Chefs Involved in a San Diego Seafood-Based Community Food Distribution Program During COVID-19

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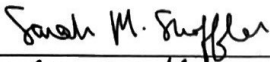
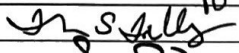
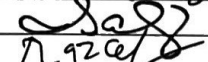
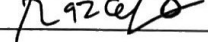
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Connection Through Fish, Food, and Culture: Benefits gained for chefs involved in a San Diego seafood-based community food distribution program during COVID-19.

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## Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread job loss, particularly in the food service and fishing industries. Loss of income and shelter in place orders also drastically increased rates of food insecurity in many communities. This led to the partnership between fishermen and food distribution organizations in many states. Particularly, in San Diego, fishermen partnered with local chefs and charities to distribute nearly 39,000 meals throughout neighborhoods most acutely affected by food insecurity and unemployment. This capstone project assessed the chefs' involvement in this program, Fish to Families. Through informal interviews, five key benefits of participating in the program were identified by chefs: **the relationships built, the skills developed, the respect gained for fish, the opportunity to connect with culture, and the unique educational experience.** An ArcGIS StoryMap was created to capture these findings, utilizing interview audio, photos, and video to assist in telling this story. The StoryMap focuses only on the benefits had by chefs involved in this program, and while other impacts and benefits may exist, they aren't thoroughly covered in this report.

## Background and Problem Statement

The Fish to Families program was initiated in 2019 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in San Diego. From 2019-2020, the percentage of individuals in San Diego that faced food insecurity increased from 25% to a peak of 39%, a disproportionate amount of these individuals being black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC)<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, due to the pandemic, the local fishing sector faced a multitude of challenges including decrease in sales and reduced ability to fish, which served to highlight the lack of necessary catch preservation infrastructure<sup>2</sup>. These issues influenced a widespread shift within the fishing sector to contribute to emergency food distribution efforts. Partnerships between fishing organizations and local meal distribution groups, funded by charitable organizations, arose to meet the needs of those who were food insecure in their communities. Programs similar to Fish to Families, at varying scale, occurred across the country from Maine, to Florida, to Alaska, to Hawaii.

Fishermen and founder of San Diego Fisherman's Working group, Peter Halmay, along with chef and owner of Craft Meals catering, Philip Esteban saw the immediate need to keep their workers employed and communities fed. With funding from the San Diego Foundation and other non-profits, Fish to Families purchased fish from local fishermen, helping ensure sales for fishermen who usually sold to restaurants or other buyers which had shut down because of the pandemic. These fish were then delivered to the team at Craft Meals, led by Esteban, that processed and prepared them into high quality meals. These meals were distributed for free to San Diegans who were faced with food insecurity.

This program ran between June 2020 and June 2021. There were approximately 39,000 meals served, nearly 7800 pounds of locally sourced fish purchased, and 12 community organizations involved in meal distribution. Fish to Families is one of many seafood-based meal distribution

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<sup>1</sup>San Diego Hunger Coalition. (2021). (rep.). The State of Nutrition Security in San Diego County: Before, during and beyond the COVID-19 Crisis Release Date: October 2021. Retrieved February 2022, from <https://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/sdhc-research-reports>.

<sup>2</sup> Stoll, J. (2021, May). Local and regional food systems response to Covid. Local Catch Network Impact Assessment II. Retrieved February 2022, from [https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/impact\\_assessments/local-catch-network-lcn-may-2021/](https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/impact_assessments/local-catch-network-lcn-may-2021/)

programs across the country that came about due to the pandemic. Collectively, these programs have served millions of seafood-based meals<sup>3</sup>. One program, Alaskans Own, in partnership with The Wave Foundation, supplied 29,000 hot meals with seafood sourced particularly from BIPOC providers<sup>4</sup>. Another, Fish to Dish, initiated by the mayor of O`ahu, utilized federal pandemic funding to purchase 100,000 pounds of fish from over 140 vessels which was prepared and distributed as 350,000 meals through the Hawai`i Foodbank and its partnering organizations<sup>5</sup>.

Though the Fish to Families program is much smaller in comparison, this program utilized local chefs to prepare meals which was generally unique. Additionally, there are intangible outcomes such as relationships established, skills gained, and cultural values considered that make this program a key case study. There were 12 chefs and cooks involved in this program, I interviewed 6 of them to better understand the benefits they gained.

The challenges of a global pandemic have highlighted the need for community-level organizing and mutual aid. And to achieve more sustainable food systems, a push for access to local, nutritious, and affordable meals is a necessity. Additionally, with food insecurity disproportionately impacting BIPOC communities, these food systems should also incorporate culturally relevant education, dishes, and cooking techniques. This project ultimately ended because funding came from a charitable initiative which was donation dependent. To document and share positive outcomes of this project, as well as fortify the need for continued funding for projects like these it is necessary to capture the whole experience of those involved. I aimed to better understand, identify, and tell the story of the chefs involved in this program, not only what they contributed, but also gained from this experience. All too often project success is defined merely by numbers and longevity. I seek to contribute to a more complete understanding of project outcomes which can lead to more informed funding and continued support of community-based efforts such as these.

### **Project Goal**

The goal of this project is to develop a better understanding of Fish to Families outcomes and identify benefits gained by chefs inclusive of intangible results including skills gained relationships built, and other capacity building measures. Through a series of informal interviews, I gathered five key benefits that chefs gained through program involvement: the relationships built, the skills developed, the respect gained for fish, the opportunity to connect with culture, and the unique educational experience.

### **Research Question and Objectives**

#### **Objectives:**

- o Identify skills gained by chefs through program involvement
- o Identify new relationships formed between chefs, fishermen, community organizations

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> The Wave Foundation. (2020). (rep.). The Wave Foundation 2020 Impact Summary. Portland, OR.

<sup>5</sup> City and County of Honolulu. (2020, September 16). "Fish to Dish" Program Supports Local Families and Businesses. Retrieved February 16, 2022, from <https://www.honolulu.gov/cms-csd-menu/site-csd-sitearticles/1305-site-csd-news-2020-cat/39442-09-16-20-%E2%80%9Cfish-to-dish%E2%80%9D-program-supports-local-families-and-businesses.html>

- o Identify cultural influences of chef involvement

Research Question:

- o What did chefs benefit from being involved in the Fish to Families program?

### **Deliverable**

The deliverable of this project was a completed StoryMap, compiled to include recorded audio from chef interviews, photos and video from the program. The goal of the StoryMap was to create an accessible and user-friendly site that can be used to inform the public about the benefits of this program. Additionally, if Fish to Families is to be reinstated in the future this StoryMap can be utilized in grant applications or shown to potential funders. The aim of this site is to tell the story of the chefs involved in this program. It highlights each of the five benefits identified by chefs. The site takes the viewer through program inception, groups involved, program outcomes, recommendations for next steps, and a collection of local food system resources.

StoryMap Link:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/099b6e4d59b74a6f8ce8f40392a7ab20>

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was drafted for informal interviews held with the chefs. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1. I applied for IRB approval and received an exemption for my study. I asked for verbal consent from the participants if I could record our conversations and use clips of them in my final deliverable. Participants reviewed what was included in their recordings and I removed anything that they did not want documented. The survey was piloted with Chef Marcus Twillegar.

These interviews were conducted in an informal setting, in restaurants, food halls, coffee shops, and online. Responses were transcribed with the audio/video editing program, Descript. Transcriptions were then corrected for mistakes and coded with the qualitative analytic program, Delve. I went through each of the six transcripts around 3 times, first to correct mistakes, next to assign codes, and lastly to choose audio to be included in the final StoryMap. I used a process of thematic analysis to code the transcripts. Thematic analysis involves reading for reoccurring patterns within or across interview data. Reading and re-listening to the transcripts, I noted many reoccurring ideas and concepts that were mentioned across the interviews. After completing coding for each transcript, I consolidated existing codes into five overarching themes. These themes were: **the relationships built, the skills developed, the respect gained for fish, the opportunity to connect with culture, and the unique educational experience.**

The relationships theme focused mainly on relationships established with local fishermen by the chefs. The skills theme covered increased cooking and kitchen management experience. The respect theme was inclusive of chefs learning zero-waste and whole fish utilization practices. The culture theme addressed Filipino cultural heritage connection chefs established through working with fish and interacting with Filipino deckhands. The educational theme included mentorship between chefs and becoming motivated to learn about conservation and sustainability concepts during the program.

Once themes were identified, the StoryMap began to be drafted. With a clear understanding of what chefs gained from the program (each theme identified) I was able to build out the

background information, summarize program impact, and set up recommendations for next steps. The draft included all the written material that would be used in the StoryMap. Transcripts were reviewed again to choose outstanding quotes that best encompassed the message of each theme. About 50 individual audio clips were chosen to be included in the StoryMap. In Descript, each clip was selected, cleaned, exported, and inserted into the draft outline. This process for each quote took about 20-30 minutes in total. "Cleaning" of the quote included correcting transcription errors, removing long pauses, redundancies, excessive filler words, background noise, and my responsive vocalizations. Once audio clips were ready, the StoryMap was put together. Weaving in short informative paragraphs with pictures, maps, videos, and audio clips.

### **Indicators of Success**

Community-based projects are able to address the imminent needs within a local food system and Fish to Families was able to exemplify this. The goal of this project was to identify and highlight outcomes for chefs involved in the Fish to Families program. The completed StoryMap will summarize the benefits identified for the chefs, their takeaways, and how their involvement in this program may influence their future role in local food systems. The StoryMap will be made available to the Fish to Families team to be utilized for future planning processes. Additionally, it can be linked across social media of the chefs and shared with their communities within the San Diego food system to educate and inform about the importance of involvement in community-based projects.

### **Skills Built and Lessons Learned**

During this project I was able to broaden my experience in conducting methods of social science. I was able to build upon my experience of working with fishing communities in the Philippines and bring in another skillset that I have been hoping to obtain to better serve these communities. I developed a deeper understanding of the methodology of putting together a social survey. I discovered the intricacies and many subtle challenges of contacting, scheduling, and establishing trust and rapport with interviewees. Though these were topics I felt comfortable and excited to discuss, it at times felt difficult to know if I was connecting with my interviewee. Through this process I have also become much more comfortable with finding and making contacts with those I want to interview. One of my biggest fears during this project was going to have to attend events solo or show up at a restaurant and ask for people, both of which I did. I feel much more confident and capable of putting myself in new and vulnerable situations to conduct this type of research. I think each interview became more fluid, comfortable, and enjoyable as well. I felt more confidence in both speaking to interviewees and discussing the subject matter. I also formed a better understanding working with and analyzing qualitative data, coding, and utilizing the framework of thematic analysis. I find that I rather enjoy working in the realm of social science as it is more directly tied to working with people and communities. I learned more about various methods for interview data analysis as well, including the Listening Guide. In terms of using new programs, I was able to learn how to use Descript and Delve. Though Descript was about 90% accurate, correcting transcripts proved to be a slow and tedious process due to the weak processing power of my computer. This process would have been completed much more smoothly and quickly if my computer did not slow down significantly while running the Descript program. Delve was helpful in assisting with coding efforts though I would also



want to try NVivo if I were to do this project again. This seems to be a program that may be more widely used for coding.

If I were to do this project again, I would give myself more time to find and interview my survey participants. It took much more time to get together the 6 interviewees and I would have enjoyed more time to track more interviewees down. Additionally, I think every step of this process took longer than anticipated. Figuring out how to get the programs to do what I wanted, especially the StoryMap, was challenging. If I was able to take the ArcGIS course during Winter Quarter I think that would have better prepared me for this project. But overall, I am grateful for the conversations I was able to have, skills learned, and mentorship I received.

### **Conclusion**

Our food systems can benefit from more community-based food distribution programs.

Especially programs like Fish to Families, which provided an immersive educational space for chefs to learn new skills, established meaningful relationships with fishermen, and encouraged heightened awareness of the ingredients they use. Furthermore, learning in a way that was culturally-relevant made the educational experience more meaningful and memorable.

As chefs, they can make local, sustainable seafood more accessible to customers, support San Diego fishermen, and contribute to a more interconnected, strengthened food system. Food is a universal language, it is culture, it is connection, and by amplifying programs like Fish to Families, we can help make our local food systems more informed and resilient.

### Appendix 1

The questionnaire was initially put together to address the research question and objectives. Since this was meant for informal interviews, these questions were meant more as a starting point for conversation. Stories and tangents arose and after the first couple of interview questions it became clear which questions were more impactful and informative. The bolded questions were those that were asked in every interview. Additionally, as questions were answered similarly in each interview, I didn't focus as much on the questions that focused on explanation of program processes but rather focused on what each chef learned or found most memorable.

#### Questionnaire:

Thank you for participating in this survey, your time and opinions are extremely valuable. All questions below are optional and any information provided will remain anonymous unless explicitly stated. This questionnaire has 15 questions and will take approximately 45 - 60 min to complete. Again, you can decline to answer any of the questions. I will verbally ask the questions and record your answers by hand (written notes) and, with your consent, video/audio record. We appreciate your help to analyze the successes, challenges, and overall outcomes of the Fish to Families Program. Your feedback will help us better understand the tangible and intangible outcomes of this project and support the need for programs like this within our local communities.

#### Intro/Get to Know You

- 1. How did you hear about Fish to Families? What made you decide to participate in this program?**
- 2. Do you make more fish-based dishes now compared to prior to the program?**

**3. Do you work with seafood, why or why not? How comfortable were you with preparing seafood-based meals before the program? Did that change after the program?**

3a. If you worked with fish, where did it come from? Were you involved in purchasing?

Behavior Change

**4. Were there new skills or fish processing/cooking techniques you learned during this program? If so, who taught you, how did you learn them? What were these skills?**

**5. How would you characterize your relationship with fishermen now compared to prior to the program? Will you continue to work directly with fishermen? Are there any barriers?**

**6. What does “zero-waste” mean to you? How did you see this concept influence the Fish to Families program? Is it a concept you aim to continue to practice?**

Roses, Buds, and Thorns (Program Reflection)

**7. What was the most memorable part of this experience for you? Positive and negative?**

**8. Was there anything that would have helped you succeed?**

**9. What could the program have done better? If the program would be conducted again, what would you like to see done differently? If you had infinite funding? What do you think needed to happen to get more support from city?**

Post-Program

10. What projects are you currently working on? If so, what kind of venture is it?

11. Do you plan to use local seafood in your dishes in the future?

Demographics

12. How long have you been working as a chef?

13. What year were you born?

15. Is there anything else you'd like to add that you think is important for me to know?