

# BANGOR DAILY NEWS

## Community-supported fish delivered to your door from the fisherman



Mike Mesko

Fisherman Matt Luck, front in beard, delivers wild-caught salmon from Alaska to North Haven last fall.

By [Kathleen Pierce](#), BDN Staff

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There was excitement last year on North Haven when fisherman Matt Luck arrived with fresh sockeye salmon. Caught far away in the chilly waters of Alaska's Bristol Bay, why were islanders cheering?

"If you are going to buy salmon from Maine, it's farmed salmon. This is very different. Everyone got to meet Matt, which is why people wanted to buy in the first place," said

Cecily Pingree, owner of Calderwood Hall restaurant and market on the island. She purchased enough sockeye to last her all year.

It's a funny scenario. Fish from Alaska arriving by skiff to a tiny island in Maine by a bearded commercial fisherman from away. In Brunswick, 40 people welcomed Luck in the same fashion.

This year shares of Luck's catch can be reserved beginning May 18 from his company [Pride of Bristol Bay](#). Buying a 20-pound case of vacuum-packed fillets may sound excessive, but it's a more sustainable way to shop. You lock in freshness and price, and "it encourages people not to get in their car when they think, 'What's for dinner tonight?'" Luck said. "The technology [for flash-freezing fresh fish] allows us to preserve this product."

Loosely based on the community-supported agriculture model popular on farms, where shares of vegetables, flowers and fruit are purchased from a farmer long before they are harvested, customers reserve their fish before nets are cast. But why are Mainers going gaga over protein from away in a locavore economy?

"It's important for people to realize, especially with seafood, that sometimes 'local' must extend beyond a geographic region," said Monique Coombs, seafood program director for [Maine Coast Fishermen's Association](#), who helped make Luck's catch available to midcoasters. "The idea is, before you catch it, I promise I'll buy it."

The concept isn't brand new. Now in its third year, [Port Clyde Fresh Catch offers a community-supported fish drop](#). Customers can pick up local sole, flounder and crab meat in Rockland and Camden every week, year-round. Recently the fishermen cooperate created a more flexible, online weekly purchasing model. Business is brisk.

Unlike buying a share in a farm, which puts money in farmers' pockets to make it through the season, supporting a fisherman such as Luck in advance helps him plan and handle logistics.

"I am more concerned about how much inventory I need, cold storage cost and shipping," he said. "There is a limit for this product. I'm a very small cog in the wheel."

Most large salmon producers don't go as far as Luck, who sells traceable seafood, complete with codes informing consumers which river it was fished from.

Locking in texture, flavor and color, "fresh frozen seafood can be very good if it's protected at time of harvest," Luck said.

“We’ve gone to great lengths to find a way to do it that has the least impact,” said Luck, who uses biodegradable material and sends fish here via barge to then hand-deliver to consumer.

His direct model is unique and time-consuming.

“People have no idea where their fish comes from,” Luck said. “By sourcing it from the companies I fish for I am calling it out, helping people make that connection to understand where protein comes from.”

Luck said, “The big companies sell it like a commodity. The story behind this is a whole model. I am willing to make a commitment, producing it with high quality standards. It’s as fine a product as you can buy anywhere.”

To Coombs, connecting consumers with stewards of sustainability is key.

“I’m trying to add value to our fishermen’s product. My goal is to get people excited,” Coombs said. “The bigger thing is for consumers to understand the diversity in the United States, not just Maine. They should be asking questions about their seafood and where it comes from.”

On the small island of North Haven, such questions are asked daily.

“We have pretty active buyers,” Pingree said. “Things like fresh eggs and local raspberries are the first things to sell.”

And Luck, who will make the trek out again in October, is becoming a familiar, positive presence.

“This is a connection with a fisherman and a premium product that people wouldn’t have otherwise,” said Pingree. “From my perspective, it is another source of great food that we are able to get our hands on.”

Here are Coombs’ tips on how to handle fresh and frozen fish:

- Storing fresh fish in a baking dish between two ice packs helps keep fish colder and, therefore, extends its refrigerated life by two to three days.
- Buy seafood in bulk and freeze. Seafood freezes just as well as other proteins. Don’t be afraid to buy frozen fish or freeze fish when you get home from shopping. (You can also cook fish from frozen. Take that, chicken.)
- Seafood is seasonal, just like agricultural products. Learn what’s in season and the different species Maine has to offer. What’s underutilized today could be overfished tomorrow if we continue to build markets for specific species instead of spreading the

love around all of Maine's great ocean offerings. A great resource is CEI's Seafood Guide: [ceimaine.org/maine-seafood-study/](http://ceimaine.org/maine-seafood-study/).

— This is a tip I learned from an old-timer: If you're going to make chowder with fish, you can freeze the fish in milk. That way, when it's time to make the chowder, you just drop the fish and milk in the pot and cook!

— Lastly, I would say, cooking fish doesn't have to be hard. Learn one or two great recipes, and you can actually cook a number of other species the same way. Hake, cod, pollock, flounder — just add a little butter and garlic and throw under the broiler for 10 to 15 minutes. Done.

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