

Virginia Fishery Resource Grant Program
FRG 2017-05
Virginia Seafood Guide
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Report Submitted: January 2019

Introduction

The project goal was to determine how can our organizations add value to and promote sustainable Virginia seafood?

This pilot project seeks to add value to Virginia Seafood products by directing consumers to sustainable seafood species caught in Virginia and make these more competitive in the marketplace. Consumers have a growing social and environmental awareness and want to support local watermen and state fisheries in addition to purchasing sustainably-caught, sourced and processed species. However, consumers need help choosing local sustainable seafood because there are so many seafood choices available to them. For example, the Virginia Aquarium's Sensible Seafood Program publishes a regional seafood guide focusing on commercially available species both general and specific to the mid-Atlantic region. There are many other guides, such as the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch Program, that promote sustainable seafood in general, but those guides are not specific to Virginia. This pilot project fills that gap.

The guide will be available to both residents and visiting consumers in a variety of formats. Both physical and digital versions of the guide will be available at restaurant counters, seafood market counters, and state-wide and national events. The guide will also educate consumers on available sustainable fishery products and promote the importance of choosing local, Virginia seafood and supporting Virginia fisheries. Educational information about Virginia sustainable seafood and the guide's research will also be available to consumers on the guide's website and through educational programs. In addition, this project will open up new avenues to promote sustainable Virginia seafood products in the future, eventually reaching an even larger scale statewide.

Methods

The core "team" for the pilot project includes representatives from the commercial seafood industry, the Virginia Waterman's Foundation, the Virginia Marine Products Board, and the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's Sensible Seafood Program. Representatives from the commercial seafood industry requested an updated "Virginia Seafood Sustainability" report, a Virginia Institute of Marine Science Marine (VIMS) Resource Report, as the basis for creating and updating the guide. These commercial industry representatives also made recommendations

to VIMS for species to include in the matrix. VIMS updated this guide in 2018 and an extension on the project was granted to accommodate a new timeline.

Once the team received the matrix, representatives met to discuss the content and general design of the guide. They agreed on several key components and design elements, which would make identifying information like seasonality and market names of Virginia species easy for consumers. The latest 2018 report of top seafood landings in Virginia prioritized which species should be included in the guide.

The Virginia Aquarium's Sensible Seafood Program representative fleshed out the guide's content for the team's review. After a round of edits, the content and design guidelines were given to the Virginia Aquarium's graphic design team and a designer was assigned to the project. The Virginia Aquarium matched the personnel costs of the grant by having their designer work on the guide at no added cost to the project.

The guide underwent several drafts, first with the Sensible Seafood Program representative, and then with the team as a whole. A later draft of the guide was also shared with the Sensible Seafood Advisory Team at the annual Sensible Seafood Advisory Team meeting. The designer had other projects pop-up that were more time-sensitive and therefore took precedence over the guide for a short period. Some of the edits and turnaround was delayed due to the designer's schedule.

One of the most time-consuming elements of the guide turned out to be finding a suitable picture that showed off Virginia seafood accurately. Many of the photos and stock images available to the design team weren't suitable. The Virginia Marine Products Board acquired oysters and delivered these to the chef and design team for a special photo shoot. The resulting images incorporate the colors of the design and guide while showing off Virginia seafood products. These photos will be available for use in other materials and projects associated with the guide.

The guide underwent a new round of edits and a last round of proofreading by team members and Virginia Aquarium staff (to ensure those outside the industry could read and follow the guide as intended). The final versions were read and proofed by the team and representatives from VIMS.

The Aquarium researched the best possible pricing for printing the guides and ordered from Professional Printing and will receive 210,000 guides on February 13, 2019. They will be stored by the team and given out during programming with some key talking points to partner organizations, restaurants, stores, and consumers. The Sensible Seafood Program alone has over 70 regional partners and will also partner with Buy Fresh Buy Local to distribute the guide locally. The Virginia Marine Products Board will distribute the guide using their statewide partnerships and introduce it to legislators at the next "Virginia Seafood Day" in Richmond, VA. The Virginia Marine Products Board also updated their website by putting a "print at home" version on their website. The designer is also formatting the guide for a "digital friendly" version that will open with both sides of the guide right-side-up for easy digital use.

Results

As a resource for the industry state-wide, everyone can use this guide as a marketing tool for their seafood products. The guide and marketing materials will be available to everyone in the fishing industry to add to their marketing campaigns. The website and the partner organizations are central to the distribution of the guide.

A “print at home” version of the guide can be found online:

- <https://www.virginiaaquarium.com/assets/Documents/Conservation/Virginia-Seafood-Guide.pdf>
- <https://www.virginiaseafood.org/about-virginia-seafood/virginia-seafood-guide-sustainability-in-virginia/>

The VirginiaSeafood.org site is being redone and will incorporate the guide as planned once the new site’s construction is finished. A PDF copy of the guide is also attached with this report.

The Virginia Waterman’s Foundation administered all funding and associated costs for members to travel to meetings, for their time working on the project, and for the guide’s printing costs. Personnel changes early in the project saved on most of the personnel costs, and minimal travel by the team kept travel costs low.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This project is a successful start to a larger-scale project promoting Virginia seafood products that are sustainable and locally available. Now that the guide is developed as a core part of the project, the team can look to creating a series of materials and talking points for distribution and carry on the next phase of the project that includes educational programs for a variety of audiences.

The most time-consuming parts of the project were waiting for the matrix, design of the guide, and sourcing an appropriate photo for the guide. Other projects with closer deadlines meant the matrix didn’t arrive when expected, which required an extension to complete the project. Other projects with more urgent deadlines also took the designer away from the project for a period of time, which required another smaller extension to complete reimbursements and reports.

As team members distribute the printed guide, the feedback from consumers will help shape the next edition of the guide and might include new species and/or elements. The guide will be updated when scientific data indicates that changing fish populations warrant an effort to shift consumer buying patterns. The team is looking ahead to the next phase of the project that adds details on species in the guide as digital resources. The team will look to asking what other guide-related resources will promote sustainable Virginia seafood products that is accessible and easy to understand.