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**Tracking underutilized species in Rhode Island, U.S. – Understanding fish as food, not just commodity**

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Traditionally in the United States, an ecosystem-based approach to managing fisheries relies primarily upon fish stock assessments and catch data. This approach neglects to include any information about the fish after they are taken from the ocean. Fish are an important component of any marine ecosystem but can also provide a healthy sustainable food source. This paper presents preliminary results in tracking the flow of underutilized fish species from landing in Rhode Island to consumption, as a way of providing a more integrated understanding of the marine socio-ecological system of which they are a part. Using participant observation and semi-structured interview data from buyers and retailers in a unique “follow-the-fish” methodology, and integrating this social data with fisheries catch and landings data, this research investigates the current distribution channels through which these fish move. The results of this research provide a more complete picture of how these fish currently contribute to the nearby marine socio-ecological system, and will supply valuable data for integrated ecosystem assessment. The focus of this work is to understand current opportunities for these underutilized species to be sold to consumers in local markets and current barriers preventing this in an effort to more sustainably manage this source of healthy, local food. The findings will contribute to a state initiative to identify ways for Rhode Islanders more access to local seafood and will to a regional fisheries initiative to understand fish as a contribution to domestic food security in the U.S.

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