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UVa grad students hoping to start fishery for Charlottesville area

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CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Two University of Virginia graduate students are hoping to bring Charlottesville, an area with plenty of community-supported agriculture programs, its first community-supported fishery.

The idea sprang from an environmental planning class at UVa, but the students are collaborating with a network of roughly 20 fish farmers to turn it into reality.

"In many ways, it's a natural extension of our interest in local food," UVa professor Tim Beatley said.

Organizers said there's already fairly strong support in the community for other local-food endeavors.

"We've got lots of people and lots of energy focused on local food and a lot more support for local farms than you might find in a typical city this size," Beatley said.

Community-supported fishery proponents tout many of the same benefits as proponents of community-supported

agriculture, including the locally produced nature of the food and a connection to the foods' producers.

The farmers want a guaranteed market if they're going to make the trek to Charlottesville, hence the community-supported fishery. The idea is that consumers would buy "shares" entitling them to regular deliveries of set amounts of frozen or, if they request, fresh, fish. When the fish farmers dropped the piscine produce off at the farmers' market, they would also have a little extra stock to sell to one-time customers, the plan goes. The network the students are working with already supplies customers in Williamsburg.

"We're hoping that this advanced-sale component would give them the guarantee that they need," one of the students, Jack Cochran, said.

Customers will be able to buy cleaned and dressed catfish, rainbow trout and prawns. There are talks of bringing hybrid striped bass to market in 2012, if all goes well.

The organizers are a nonprofit, trying to connect customers to fish farmers. The farmers themselves, of course, are for-profit business owners.

The fish should cost somewhere in the neighborhood of \$10 per pound. A basic enrollment might provide something like two pounds of fish per delivery, organizers said.

"This is money that essentially goes directly to the fisher," Beatley said.

Beatley was inspired by a community-supported fishery in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. That CSF, one of about 10 nationally, he estimates, uses wild-caught fish.

The Charlottesville organizers ended up going with what they say they believe are responsibly raised aquaculture fish. They were "trying to keep it as local as fish can be," Doug Dickerson, the other student organizing the push, said.

An early effort to gauge interest, using fliers and surveys, has suggested the idea has promise, but the proof won't be in the pudding until people are actually buying shares, which the two hope will be in February, Dickerson said.

The two have created a mailing list for those interested in the project. Potential customers can e-mail Dickerson at [dickerson.douglas\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:dickerson.douglas(at)gmail.com) or Cochran at [jec7df\(at\)virginia.edu](mailto:jec7df(at)virginia.edu) to be added to a mailing list. The CSF's site is csfcharlottesville.wordpress.com.

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