

The Impact of Fish 2.0

Seafood businesses hold the potential to improve global food security, ocean sustainability, and the livelihoods of local communities. But to transform the seafood industry, these businesses need capital investments to grow and take advantage of new markets.

Below are some examples of how seafood entrepreneurs and investors are using the new connections and knowledge gained through Fish 2.0 to build businesses that value sustainability.

Stories from Competitors

Ed Robinson – Acadia Harvest

With decades of experience in the C-suite, Ed Robinson is surprising proof that old dogs can indeed learn new tricks (his words, not ours).

When he pitched at Fish 2.0 2015 as a finalist, the Acadia Harvest CEO focused his comments on the sustainability of his company's farm-raised California yellowtail. His investor audience, however, simply assumed his product was sustainable and instead peppered him with hard questions about Acadia's financials and market outlook.



"We took the feedback to heart and decided to revamp," says Ed.



His team reworked their business plan specifically for the impact-investment community, drawing upon several Fish 2.0 contacts for input. The new plan had a very clear focus on yellowtail production and sales, enabling the team to raise \$700,000 in 2016.

Among the Fish 2.0 contacts was Aaron Fuchs, who had served as an advisor during the 2013 competition. In recent weeks, Aaron has been developing a new, five-year planning model for Acadia as it prepares a major fundraising effort. The company is now talking with Aaron about a longer-term role.

Ed credits "the discipline espoused by Fish 2.0 around metrics and tracking" for Acadia's big strides during the past two years. "We've hired seven new employees, all from the area, and we're offering year-round pay, benefits, even stock options."

Acadia is planning to build a commercial plant in the village of Corea, an economically disadvantaged area in Downeast Maine. With strong support from around the state and among major investors, Ed is optimistic the company will break ground early next year.



Emmanuelle Bourgois – FairAgora Asia

The tech startup scene is already competitive, but try getting your idea off the ground as a foreigner in a developing corner of the world where the seafood industry isn't known for fairness or transparency.

Emmanuelle Bourgois, founder and director of Bangkok-based FairAgora Asia, recognized the need in Southeast Asia for an online platform that tracks, manages, and analyzes social and environmental data so that seafood operators can attain cost-effective, risk-based verification. But she wasn't sure her idea, now called Verifik8, was ready to pitch at Fish 2.0 2015.



She came to Stanford anyway and was immediately set at ease by the “benevolent environment” of the competition. “Benevolence is not only having nice people around, but also having the protection for when you fail,” says Emma. “That was the beauty of the mentors—to have their feedback, to identify the pain points.”

A year and a half later, and still drawing frequently on Fish 2.0 resources such as webinars, Emma has been able to shape her idea into a solid business model with well-thought-out financials and impact metrics. Verifik8 now has pilots underway in Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam, with Bangladesh and Myanmar on the horizon.

“Without Fish 2.0, I wouldn't be here,” says Emma. “Yes, it's a strong thing to say, but it's true. No other accelerator is able to give you the resources that you need.”

Jacqueline Claudia – LoveTheWild

Although the Fish 2.0 finals event is packed with investors, not everyone connects directly during those two days. So 2015 semifinalist Jacqueline Claudia decided to use her 90 seconds “to make myself memorable.”

The Boulder, Colorado-based entrepreneur pitched LoveTheWild, a line of prepackaged, easy-to-prepare meals of sustainable seafood. In a subsequent audience vote for the semifinalist they most wanted to follow up with, Jacqueline crushed it.



What followed was a blur of introductions, chat, and exchanged business cards. Jacqueline talked with a venture capitalist who had no interest in investing in her business. He did, however, know of someone who might.

Their brief conversation ultimately led to an introduction to Leonardo DiCaprio's business manager. The actor and environmental activist signed on as an advisor to LoveTheWild — and eventually signed over a check as well.

“Fish 2.0 was the domino that fundamentally changed the course and trajectory of my business,” says Jacqueline.

The growth of LoveTheWild since then is best told by numbers: from 2 retailers to 627; from \$750,000 in raised capital to \$4.2 million; from 50 percent aquaculture sources to 100 percent; from 3 full-time employees to 11.

And despite all the mentoring and pitch coaching and investor introductions that gave her business “a five-year head start,” Jacqueline maintains that the most valuable thing she gained at Fish 2.0 was a community.

“So many of the people I met, I now talk with them on a weekly basis — investors, suppliers, other businesses,” she explains. “Even though you could squint and call us competitors, we’re a really supportive network. And nobody understands your business like they do.”

Sherry Flumerfelt – Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust

Fish 2.0 is ultimately a network, not a shark tank. Just ask Sherry Flumerfelt, executive director of the Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust.

In 2015, Sherry pitched her nonprofit against numerous competitors, including the Alaska Community Seafood Hub, run by Executive Director Kelly Harrell. The women found they had too much in common to get caught up in the winning/losing stuff.



“I met Kelly, and we definitely connected. We were tweeting each other during the event,” says Sherry. “I was excited when she won. I thought she deserved it.”

Kelly had pitched a seafood hub that would bolster the supply chain for Alaska fishers and widen the local economic, social, and environmental impacts, much like the hubs for agricultural communities in the Lower 48.

Sherry and Kelly went out for a celebratory drink, and they talked about how to adapt Kelly’s idea for Sherry’s constituency in California. Similar to Alaska’s wild-catch industry, Monterey Bay fisheries are reeling from the economic effects of cheap, imported seafood that has

little, if any, guarantee of sustainability, unlike locally sourced fish from verified producers. When the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation put out a request for innovative proposals, Sherry knew who to call for advice, materials, and research.

Sherry got the NFWF grant, along with funding from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, to explore the creation of a seafood hub in her community. The feasibility study is nearly done, and she and her advisory committee will soon decide if a business plan and funder targets should be next on their agenda.



Lane and Claire Constant – Quixotic Farming

Family-owned and aptly named, Quixotic Farming is an anomaly in a part of the United States covered with fields of corn, soybean, and grain. That’s because Quixotic has been on a mission since 2011 to scale up sustainable aquaculture at its nurseries and processors in Missouri and Colorado.



“We were on par with traceability and sustainability,” says COO Lane Constant, “but at Fish 2.0, you meet people who are raising fly larvae for feed and people using biodegradable nets. You get excited learning about all the ideas that are out there.”

Since the 2015 competition, the Constants have installed 23 new tanks and added 600,000 gallons of water to raise tilapia, some of which are fed with Quixotic’s own organic grain. To reduce the amount of fish wasted during processing, the company is working closely with pet food businesses — an avenue that was validated by other participants they met at Fish 2.0.

Quixotic has also become a sustainability evangelist, organizing a contract-grower program that will enable other Missouri farmers to raise and sell tilapia using its standards. “We got lots of responses,” says Chief Marketing Officer (and Lane’s sister) Claire Constant. “People were saying, ‘We have land,’ ‘We have an old barn,’ ‘We have all this space, all this interest.’”



Before Fish 2.0, “we never knew anyone else who was doing anything even close,” says Claire. “So meeting these fellow fish enthusiasts who have their own experiences and knowledge to share was such a huge part of our growth acceleration.”

Alan Lovewell – Real Good Fish

Alan Lovewell was a finalist at the first Fish 2.0 in 2013, back when the event was still finding its legs and Alan himself was “all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.”



He was pitching Local Catch (now called Real Good Fish), a community-supported fishery in Northern California with a growing list of subscribers for its sustainable, locally sourced seafood.



“Fish 2.0 ended up being Entrepreneurship 101,” says Alan. “It felt very much like a class not grounded in a campus.”

Alan has a degree in studio art and East Asian studies, so the learning curve for business innovation was steep. He thought his pitch at the finals deserved a C, but the Packard Foundation felt otherwise. After an introduction by one of his board members, Alan received two bridge grants totaling \$250,000. The grants allowed him to hire staff and expand his company’s reach to the San Francisco Bay Area. Now he’s on a perpetual hunt for local sources of fresh fish to meet the needs of 1,400 members.



In one significant respect, Alan has come full circle since his years creating sculpture at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He recently sent an email to the executive chef at his alma mater and received an enthusiastic response.

“The chef was new in his position, pushing local procurement and pushing to provide higher-level food at the university,” says Alan. “He saw that working with us would have greater impact.” Real Good Fish now provides UCSC with 300 to 600 pounds of seafood every month.

Hoyt Peckham – SmartFish

When he inhabited the world of academia, Hoyt Peckham was not only encouraged to prattle on for long stretches of time, he was rewarded for it. But at Fish 2.0, he had only a minute and a half to make his case.

“That was by far the hardest 90 seconds of my professional life up to now, and it was also the most useful,” says Hoyt, president of the SmartFish Group. “I use parts of that 90-second pitch every day when talking to fishermen, clients, and investors.”



Hoyt’s thriving company is a unique hybrid in the sustainable seafood sector. Originally started as an NGO with philanthropic funding to support artisanal fishing communities in Mexico, SmartFish has developed a for-profit branch that delivers its partners’ sustainable product to high-value channels such as boutique restaurants and eco-cruise ships.

The growth of SmartFish has tracked with the growth of Fish 2.0. When Hoyt first brought his idea to Stanford in 2013, he won Best

Short Pitch. Two years later, able to tout growth and pilot sales, he and his team reaped two ICX prizes: an advisory with Charly Kleissner and another with Highliner.

In the spirit of Fish 2.0 cross-pollination, SmartFish itself became a prize in 2015. A consultation with Hoyt and his team was awarded to ARCAE (Costa Rican Environmental and Educational Network), an NGO pioneering a similar hybrid enterprise in Central America. The on-site visit with ARCAE paid surprising dividends for SmartFish.

“Analyzing their options through the lens of our experience helped them, but it also helped us refine several aspects of our model,” says Hoyt. “It was doubly enriching. Giving back led us to strengthen our own approach.”



Perspectives from Investors



“We really value participating in Fish 2.0 as both sponsors and judges — it has expanded and strengthened our network, brought us really interesting deals to look at, gives a good sense of challenges and opportunities in the global seafood sector, and is always a great time.”

- Mike Velings and Amy Novogratz, Aqua-Spark
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“As an early stage investor in the sustainable seafood sector, I need to be connected to the entire ecosystems, ranging from entrepreneurial teams, to other early stage investors, to mentors and advisors for these teams, to industry experts and customers, to downstream investors. Participating in Fish 2.0 as a judge, mentor and investor has made connecting easy, at both the local and global level. The few hours a week involved more than repay themselves with access to great opportunities and great people throughout the sustainable seafood network.”

- Brock Mansfield, Salmon Innovation Fund
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“Whether you are looking for introduction to sustainable seafood or in-depth exploration of a particular aspect of the value chain, Fish 2.0 offers critical insights and opportunities to all audiences. The competition is not only connecting outstanding entrepreneurs with interested investors, but it’s helping to build an entire field – and a movement – in the process. We look forward to attending Fish 2.0 to get exposure to interesting opportunities and key stakeholders in the sustainable seafood sector.”

- Leigh Moran, Calvert Foundation
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“The premium investors place on outstanding expertise and quality teams in early stage ventures has never been higher. Fish 2.0 shows my investor base vetted, prepped organizations- organizations featuring good stewardship and potential profits, organized business plans and presentations, at sane expectations and valuations.”

- Frank McGrath, Oberon Securities
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“RSF has a long track record of investing in sustainable food and agriculture and while we see the ‘sustainable fish sector’ as a critical piece of this work – its challenges, risks and opportunities are so unique that we cannot simply apply the same investment lens. Working with Fish 2.0 as an online judge and advisor has given us amazing exposure to great companies/pipeline but more importantly it has given us the opportunity to educate ourselves on the sector which has helped us to make better investment decisions in our own portfolio. It is one of the few engagements where I learn more each year that I participate and the colleagues that Monica brings together is unmatched in the food and agriculture space.”

- Kate Danaher, RSF Social Finance