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Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:05] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov, and I'm the host of this podcast The Conch. We're sailing along on our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're showcasing some of the incredible people working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. Today, we are excited to have an amazing guest join us, Daisy Berg! Daisy is the Program and Category Manager of Seafood at New Seasons Market, a chain of privately owned grocery stores operating in Portland, Oregon, Southwest Washington and Northern California. Welcome and thank you, Daisy, for joining me today on The Conch. Let's go!

Daisy Berg [00:00:45] Thank you so much for having me, Julie. I'm so excited to be here.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:47] I'm excited to have you here, too, because you're the first retailer, representative of a retail chain, that we've had on the program. And so this is an exciting topic of conversation, just retail sales of seafood. So I'm really excited to have you on here and listen to some of your insights.

Daisy Berg [00:01:05] Great.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:05] So I know you, of course, were both in Portland, Oregon. So we have a friendship, which is great because I also learn a lot from you. I do know a little about your background, but I'd love for you to share with our listeners how you ended up where you are today at New Seasons.

Daisy Berg [00:01:23] My background is very odd for seafood. I grew up in New Mexico in a little tiny town called Tajique. We had in that little town about 130 people, and my dad was working for the Community Action Program in the next town over called Estancia. It was early eighties. He had a cousin on the East Coast that had been in Vietnam and his family, my cousin John's family really wanted them to find something and find himself after being in Vietnam. He had pretty bad PTSD. So he came out to New Mexico. My dad had a business degree and he said, John, what do you want to do? Let's start a business together. I want to get you set up here. John knew some people in the seafood industry in Massachusetts and said, How about we start bringing in seafood into New Mexico? From there, they created a business plan. They opened up a little seafood wholesaler. They brought in seafood mostly from the East Coast, from Massachusetts and from Florida, and began selling to restaurants in the Albuquerque area. Well, John got bored of it very quickly and left. And my dad was left with this company called Nantucket Shoals, and he continued with it. Eventually, as the family moved to Albuquerque. We opened up a couple of seafood markets, which my mom ran. My sister and I were involved in it, and I kept telling myself I needed to get out of the seafood business. So I tried multiple times. Long story short, I got an art degree that didn't work out. I worked in the restaurant world for a long time. I moved all around the country and I kept coming back to seafood. After a short stint in skin care and moving back to Portland after hopping around all over the place, I decided that I really miss seafood and I wanted to make my way back. So I started working for New Seasons Market about 16 years ago in one of our locations. We currently have 19 here in the Portland metro area, and I started working in one of the busiest stores and it was fun and exciting and I got to learn so much and just continue on my journey and took a few positions in the company, doing a few other things and eventually landed into this role about nine years ago, which is the program and category manager. So I oversee everything seafood for the company and also some meat stuff as well.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:52] So that's an amazing story. This was your dad helping his cousin John coming back from Vietnam. So that in and of itself is an incredible story, like how they decided to start the seafood business to support the family coming back from this traumatic event. I just think that's really inspiring. Why Nantucket Shoals? That's an interesting name.

Daisy Berg [00:04:14] So Nantucket, you're familiar with Nantucket.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:17] Yes.

Daisy Berg [00:04:17] The place Nantucket. Shoals means shallow water. And since New Mexico doesn't have a lot of water, they thought it was pretty funny thing to call it Nantucket Shoals because there's not really any water in New Mexico.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:28] So this was in the eighties you said?

Daisy Berg [00:04:29] They started the business in 1982. And I was just a little thing. And my mind went to this really ridiculous image of my dad and cousin John pushing around a cart in Albuquerque, you know, the old wooden ones with the covering on top, and they would have seafood in there. And that's how they were going to sell seafood. I thought they were going to be like fish peddlers.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:52] On the street with a cart full of oysters and clams.

Daisy Berg [00:04:56] Yes, exactly.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:58] That's awesome. Is Nantucket Shoals still a thing or, no?

Daisy Berg [00:05:01] It's not. My dad sold his portion of the business in the late nineties, which was the wholesale portion. My mom kept the seafood market open. She ended up just having one and running one. And she kept that open until about five years ago when she retired. So it was open for nearly 30 years.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:22] Wow, That's amazing. You said you tried to get out of this business and you kept coming back to it. That's a real common theme of people that are on this show. Even me, I tried to leave fisheries and seafood several times. And then when I did have my mid-life crisis a couple of years ago, I did seriously consider leaving and then I was like, I can't leave. I have too much fun and I love it so much. And plus I get to meet cool people like you. So it's really hard.

Daisy Berg [00:05:50] It is definitely hard to leave. And the thing that keeps pulling me back and has solidified my life in this world is the endless knowledge that seafood provides. Everything's changing. It's always new, always something different to learn about. And I just love that quest for knowledge and I can't give it up.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:11] Yeah, you're totally right, and I agree with you. I learn many things new every day. And so I think if you're really into learning and growing and building knowledge, then this is a really great industry for you. So as I mentioned, you are the first retailer representative that we've had on this program and the importance of retailers in this whole industry is, I think, widely acknowledged and widely known. I want to dive in a little bit deeper with you about this while I have you here. Can we talk about sourcing seafood for a little bit as a retailer?

What does an average day look like for you and how do you source seafood? And again, I realize this is a real complicated process, I'm sure, and you don't need to get too much in the weeds. I would just like to get a little taste of how you go about sourcing seafood for 19 stores.

Daisy Berg [00:07:00] The way that we source seafood for New Seasons is first it has to meet a sustainability requirement. We are partnered with FishWise and Seafood Watch. And we go through rigorous checks to ensure that the items that we're carrying meet either a Seafood Watch green or yellow or another eco labeled benchmark. So something like MSC, ASC, BAP, at least two star. So that's the first item that we're looking for. Secondly, I try to source as locally as possible. I believe that there has been a big gap in the Portland market with tapping into the seafood that comes directly out of the water that is only 65 to 100 miles away. So I really want to introduce or reintroduce these species into the market in the Portland area. So we really look heavily at all of the groundfish that comes out of the oceans close by. Beyond that, I also look at sustainable aquaculture options. Some are close by and some we have to go outside of our area to find. So for example, we source a beautiful trout out of Idaho. Clams, mussels, oysters all come from close by and the estuaries that are in Oregon and Washington. And then for everything that we can't find here, let's say, for example, a large shrimp, we have to go outside of the area. So we look for wild options and also farmed options that meet our requirements. There are many things to look at. And one thing that I always say when I'm looking at bringing in a new product and I have a new vendor or a new group that's pitching a new item to me. I want to make sure that price doesn't come into the factor when I'm making the decision on whether or not we're going to carry it. And I ask them to hold their cost pitch to the very end. I don't want to know what it's going to cost to bring it here or where it's at, because I want to know if it actually fits into our market first.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:05] That's a really interesting comment and procedure, I think, because, you know, I've talked to other people and they say that quality and cost are the biggest factors. Yes, of course, cost plays ultimately in the final decision. But I think it's neat that you wait until the end to figure out how much this is going to cost you.

Daisy Berg [00:09:23] I feel like seafood is difficult to raise. It's difficult to harvest. There's a constant cold chain that needs to happen and it also just because of the complexity of the supply chain, it passes through multiple hands or ports, if you will, before it gets to the final user. Because of that, seafood is expensive and honestly, it should be. I'm not saying that it needs to be so expensive that it is exclusive and that only some people get it but it is an expensive item and trying to hold the costs down really hurts the beginning of the supply chain more than any other place along the road.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:03] Yeah, because that's where all the squeezing happens, right? So in order to eliminate or reduce costs, a lot of the reduction happens, like you said, at the beginning of the supply chain, which is really harmful for the fishers and the fishing communities.

Daisy Berg [00:10:16] Exactly. And when you're looking at that boat cost \$0.05, \$0.10, \$0.25 makes a huge difference. Whereas you get to the retail level, we're looking at the end dollar. So is it \$12.95? Is it \$9.95? It's never that five cent increment that's hurting us so we can absorb a little bit more of that and the fisherman gets a bit more, that's fantastic.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:41] I think that's a good way to go about it and keeping your prices, you know, as good as possible, but also recognizing that the people throughout the chain are doing really hard work. New Seasons is down the street for me, so I do shop at New Seasons. It's a little bit more expensive, to be honest. But I think you're telling us why, right, because you value the

people that are harvesting these items. I'm speaking about the seafood products that you sell. Do you find that your customers recognize that as well? Do you ask them through surveys or anything? How do you get feedback from customers around the seafood?

Daisy Berg [00:11:13] We do. We periodically run surveys that are targeted for just the seafood consumer or the meat and seafood consumer. And we've asked questions like if you know where this product is coming from and you know that it's coming from a specific producer with a story behind it, are you more likely to pay a dollar more, \$2 more or \$3 more? And there is a threshold in there. There is a place where they just say it's too expensive. But within that, they're willing to pay more if they know that the money is getting closer to that story or that person or that producer that is bringing that specific seafood item to their plate.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:00] That's really smart, like you said, is the threshold they'll support something up until a certain point and then they'll be like, no, I can't do this. That's great that you're able to kind of survey people and determine what that threshold is. I think that's really interesting.

Daisy Berg [00:12:12] On top of that, I think that there needs to be honesty in seafood as well. I worry that, you know, making statements that a story will sell more is going to lead a retailer into saying, Well, let's make up a story or let's put a fisherman's picture behind the counter and then people think that all of this fish is coming from this particular fisher person. One way that we bring that together at New Seasons is through staff education and letting them meet some of these producers so that they have the story in their own words.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:12:45] We didn't talk about seasonality, and I think that probably plays a big part also in your sourcing decisions. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Daisy Berg [00:12:54] Usually at the beginning of the year, I try to plan the entire year out with some historical knowledge about when these seasons are going to open. My biggest driver to bring customers into the seafood market portion of the store is through our weekly flier. And so I start to plan out the year based on the seasonality and the season openers of the different wild species. In March, I know that halibut is going to land right around the 20th or so, so I'm starting to plan for that. I look for the local Oregon based shrimp and that sometimes in April, sometimes it doesn't happen quite till May, but we're planning all the way through it. And we do the same thing with all of the wild salmon species that we carry. And we have this great tool that we started a couple of years ago. Mostly New Seasons uses it for the produce seasons and for the seafood seasonal openers. So it's called seasonal arrivals. And we do a story on our Instagram feed that just announces the arrival of these different items that are coming in. And it's a really great way to alert customers on items that are coming in because it's kind of a moving target every year.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:14:05] Everyone always awaits the season opener of Copper River salmon. First of all, do you sell Copper River salmon? And second of all, do you work with them and say, Hey, let's make a big campaign about this or does that happen?

Daisy Berg [00:14:17] We do sell Copper River salmon at a few locations at the beginning of the season. It's pretty expensive. And like I was saying earlier, there's a threshold. So there are some customers that are really excited by it and they're diehard fans and they want the first catch every single year. So for sure we do carry it. And I do speak directly with the Copper River folks in conjunction with our main distributor here in Portland. And we talk about the seasonal arrival. When is the first fish going to get on the first plane? What that looks like. I usually get reports within

the first few hours of the first opener to see what the catch is looking like, what we think the cost is going to be and when we could potentially get that first fish.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:01] It sounds like a real complicated process when you account for all the different types of fish and seafood that you're sourcing.

Daisy Berg [00:15:07] And that's the fun of it. It's constantly changing. I've become a really good decision maker. I make decisions in 30 seconds flat. Maybe not that fast, but I try to be really quick on the draw because it's really important to be able to make that decision and move on to the next one. They're just constantly coming at me.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:26] Does carbon footprint of a product, of a seafood product, play into any of your sourcing decisions, or how are you thinking about climate friendly seafood?

Daisy Berg [00:15:36] Carbon footprint absolutely plays a role. Seafood is a globally traded commodity, and so I am constantly thinking about the impact that it has. That is why we try to source locally as much as possible and really gear customers towards that local item like rockfish or like a black cod that's caught on the coast or the mussels and clams and oysters that are absolutely great for carbon sequestration. It definitely plays a role. Unfortunately, in order to compete in the market, we have to look outside of our local waters to be able to be competitive. So we do have to carry an Atlantic salmon. But I put a lot of thought into where that Atlantic salmon is coming from, how it's getting here, and most of it is flying on a commercial liner that's already on the way. I try to look for efficiencies within the supply chain so that we're not causing more problems.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:16:38] That's going to lead me to my next question. We have abundant salmon resources here in Oregon and in Alaska, which is Washington, Alaska, which is close. So you offer an Atlantic salmon, which is a farmed salmon product, right? So why? That's a question that people ask, you know what I mean?

Daisy Berg [00:17:01] It's a fantastic question. I'll try to keep the story short because it's kind of a longer one.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:17:06] No it's good.

Daisy Berg [00:17:07] So New Season started over 20 years ago, 22 years ago. When New Seasons opened their doors. They decided that they weren't going to carry farmed Atlantic salmon and only focused on the wild options that were available. And we did that all the way until 2017. In the early days of 2017, we had new leadership in the company and they said, Hey, you know, we'd really like for you to look for in Atlantic salmon so that we can have and offer fresh salmon year round. Prior to that, we were selling fresh wild salmon through the summer when the season was open. We'd put in a big order with a single producer for a frozen coho that we could sell all during the winter. And our customers loved it and they were fine. But there was a very market drop in movement on wild salmon when we switched over to frozen. So, I very reluctantly said, Fine, I'll look for it, but I'm pretty sure I'm not going to find anything that fits into our mix and that meets our requirements. So I spent about four months doing some research on my own and then setting up some meetings with some producers at Seafood Expo North America in Boston in the spring of 2017. I was blown away with the people and the producers that I talked to there. I met with five and from that five I narrowed it down to two that would actually meet our requirements. And I asked questions like, What is the feed that you're feeding these fish? What does transportation look like?

Are you using any harmful chemicals to remove the sea lice from the fish? So looking at pesticides, what does the output look like in the ocean? And after all of that, I found Atlantic salmon that was raised on land that was becoming commercially available and was out of Denmark. So I was really excited. I came back. I let everyone know that I actually found something. I kind of had to eat my own words because I was really just kind of going through the motions honestly, because I didn't think there was anything out there for us. But that's the exciting thing about aquaculture, is that it changes constantly. It's such a new industry and there are such great new innovations in it every single day. So I called the producer, I said I really wanted to carry the salmon. They were excited about it. And then they said, You know what? I don't think we can do it. I don't think we have a way to bring it to the West Coast, we're not there yet. And I was deflated, but I had a runner up. About a week later, I got a call back from that producer and they said, We figured it out. We can bring salmon to you. Will you be our first retailer on the West Coast? And I said, Yes. So we put together a good plan. And in October of 2017, we introduced farmed Atlantic salmon to our customers for the very first time. It was right when wild salmon fresh season was closed and we did a lot of work to not only bring our seafood and meat staff, but also announce it to the rest of the company that we decided to change our stance. And the industry had changed enough and we were ready to bring in this product. We put together a good marketing campaign and once the product launched, I sat and I held my breath and I was certain that I was going to get so many people yelling at me. Instead, all I heard back was that it was exciting. They were excited to see all of the work that went into it. They were excited to try it. There were a few die-hards that were still saying, No, we'll never eat Atlantic salmon, but thank you for doing your homework. And I had a few people that I had some conversations with and read some long emails, but really it was like three, one of which I still hear from this many years later. When anything changes, she still says, I'm not going to eat farmed salmon, but I still appreciate what you're doing.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:20] That's interesting. There's always someone who's going to have comments about what you do and it sounds like you did do your due diligence and reluctantly at first, but it seemed to have worked out in the end.

Daisy Berg [00:21:29] It absolutely did.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:31] In preparation for our discussion today, I do a little research on you and, you know, I know you and I saw in, I think it was an interview that you did, that some supermarket retailers have begun offering and selling what they're calling trash fish, quote unquote. Which is a term for those species that are bycatch. And so they're incidental catch by fishers that are going after more popular species and more varieties in popular varieties. And you said that at New Seasons you make a point to acquire available varieties from your suppliers as a means of supporting the chain's overall commitment to sustainability. Besides the horrible name trash fish, which I hate, and we can talk about also your feelings on that term, what are some of the challenges around sourcing fish that the average consumer might not know? Right? You have to educate them. What are the challenges around that and how do you address those challenges?

Daisy Berg [00:22:24] I prefer to call them underappreciated or untargeted species. Trash fish is a terrible word. But it does get people's attention, which is great. We try to look for availability of some of these items and some of them, I don't really even consider untargeted species, but they're just not as widely known. So Dover sole would be a really great example of something that's kind of always there, but most people don't look towards it. It's a great, mild, delicate, sweet filet that is really versatile and takes on the flavors of other things or you can just eat the fish and it's a nice, delicate form. Other items in the sole family or in the flats would be something like a Rex sole, which is similar to a sanddab. It comes, it's called pan ready, but it has basically all of the bones

still in it. It's a really great, beautiful little fish. And so what we try to do is offer these items everyday because you really can't eat halibut and King salmon every single day unless you're you know extremely rich. It gets really hard and seafood is so healthy for you. So I want to make sure that customers have something else to look for. I also am really excited that when we can, we carry all five types of wild salmon, so everything down to a pink salmon or a chum or keta is what we call it. They're really great fish when they're taken care of properly, like a pink salmon eats like the best trout you've ever, ever had. And so I want to offer that when it's available and customers get really excited because the price is a lot lower and all of the health benefits are still there.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:08] Yeah, I worked with pink and chum salmon for the majority of my career and they always got a bad rap and I never knew why because they're really good and tasty.

Daisy Berg [00:24:16] They are extremely tasty. And I was really taught a lesson early on when I started working for New Seasons, we started carrying chum from the Puget Sound from a small producer called Loki Fish, and it's a family owned business and they were really wonderful about promoting this underappreciated species by saying, Hey, we're taking care of it just like we would a King salmon, and we're catching it out before it gets into the river system, before they stop eating, their really nice fish, give them a try and think of it as kind of your introductory salmon. For people that don't really like the salmon flavor, it's really nice and mild.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:58] It's the gateway salmon.

Daisy Berg [00:25:01] Yes, we always called it the kids salmon.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:05] Oh, that's so funny.

Daisy Berg [00:25:06] If your kids really don't like the taste of fish, chum is a great way to start, especially if you want to add some sort of marinade to it teriyaki or whatever it is.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:25:19] You mentioned back earlier in the conversation that you work with some sustainability advisors FishWise and Seafood Watch, and I just wanted to learn more about how does that work? What do you do with them? How do they advise you? What does that relationship look like?

Daisy Berg [00:25:36] We work most closely with FishWise, and I have a direct contact there, Jack, who helps me understand the sustainability and the rating or the ecolabel of each of the species that we carry. So not only do we have a constant dialog when I'm looking for a new product, or if a rating has changed because they get reassessed all the time, but they also do a third party verification system. So they will do a vendor survey of all of the vendors that we're sourcing products from. I give them raw data, what we've sold over the review period, so it could be a year or so. I send that over to Jack at FishWise and to their team, and then they reach out to our vendors and the vendors provide information to verify the catch location, the species names, the catch method of all of the products that we've carried over that review period. When that survey is closed, they come back to me and present me with a buying guide saying, okay, this is where they're doing great and meeting the requirements of your commitment, and this is where we see some risk. So you know look a little more closely at this particular species, where it's coming from and where you might be at risk of bringing in a product that doesn't meet your requirements.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:27:03] That sounds like a really beneficial kind of relationship for you because you get an analysis of your sourcing. They also collect information that's, I think,

beneficial for the larger responsible seafood movement. So I'm curious, how does social responsibility play into these sourcing decisions that you're making now? Because I know that FishWise they started out very environmentally focused, but also they focus a lot on social responsibility. That's evolved, I'm assuming, into your relationship as well, right?

Daisy Berg [00:27:31] It has absolutely evolved and it is something that we talk about often and it's a difficult subject to tackle. The places where we've been able to really look at it is through aquaculture species and especially in the shrimp industry and the wild shrimp industry. So we're constantly asking questions of our producers. What does your social responsibility look like? What do you do for the people that not only raise your products or harvest your products, but what about the people that are in the plants doing the further production? And you, Julie, actually opened my eyes to this quite a bit, which is how we met. You were working for Fair Trade seafood and I was just starting to understand what social responsibility looks like in the seafood supply chain. So, thank you.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:22] Yeah, you're welcome. That's a compliment, thank you. And you're right. I mean, it's a complicated discussion and it is very nuanced and it's very I don't want to say new because we've been talking about these things for a while, but it's it's something that's pretty controversial, like opening your books and seeing if you have any kind of ultimately forced labor, you know, in your supply chains. And people just they're like, there's nothing to see here. A lot of times. And so I think it's really great that you're having these conversations and looking at these things and keeping your eyes open to the possibility that there's a lot of really sketchy things that happen in seafood supply chains. And if you find them, then you're going to do something about it, right? I think that's great because a lot of people do not take that stance.

Daisy Berg [00:29:08] Absolutely.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:09] We're going to transition a little bit into your role as a woman in seafood. But I want to talk quickly about you mentioned also, you know, in order to get the story across of the seafood, you train your, I guess, fishmongers, right? People, you know, behind the glass counter that are selling your seafood at New Seasons. What are those training programs like and how do they really encourage seafood literacy in consumers? Because we talked about seafood literacy in the last episode of The Conch, so I'm curious, how do you go about training your staff?

Daisy Berg [00:29:38] We set up monthly product knowledge classes, and when I first started in the role nine years ago, I was doing in-person classes and mostly it was me talking about different species and different fisheries. And sometimes I would have guest come in and speak about their specific products. It has transitioned over the years and really COVID changed the way that we operate it. So now we have video conferences. It's easier to put them on once a month. Prior to that I was doing one a quarter. The way that those work is I set up a meeting. Everyone is welcome to come, I record it and for the first half hour we have a producer join us. We actually have one tomorrow and that will be with a small producer out of Pelican, Alaska called Yakobi. And interesting enough, Seth and Anna live here in Portland, close to one of our stores during our off season. So it's really exciting to be able to have them join us because the staff hasn't met them yet. We've been carrying their salmon for, I want to say, six years and I tell a lot of their stories, but it'll be really excited for them to tell their story as well. So we'll start with that. They talk for about 30 minutes. They can present pictures, do a presentation, whatever it is, and then we open it up to questions for the staff afterwards. And thankfully, I have a great group of people that are very engaged. We usually have 5 to 10 or even longer minutes worth of questions coming in. And then

at the end of that, the producers hop off of the call and we continue to discuss a few items that are just going on in the market right now.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:17] That's super. I mean, I think that's so important and I'm sure there's been really great feedback and experiences from people coming into the store and hearing these stories. And I think it's also probably helpful for the staff too, right, because they get to engage in a meaningful way with customers.

Daisy Berg [00:31:33] That's exactly it. And seafood doesn't sell itself, that's been my tag for three years. It's never going to sell itself. People are intimidated by it. It's expensive and they're worried that when they get it home, they're going to mess it up and overcook it or undercook it. The best thing that we have are the staff being able to talk to customers and guide them through their journey on what they're going to purchase and how they're going to cook it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:31:59] Interestingly enough, I gave a presentation to your team in, it was either February or March of 2020. That was the last in-person thing I did before COVID.

Daisy Berg [00:32:11] Yes, that was, yep.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:13] Yeah. Because maybe I didn't mention, but your office is just down the street from my house, and I remember that and it was really great. It was a really great opportunity to talk to the team and learn from them, but also, you know, share some of the stories about what I was working on. So it was great. So let's transition to talking about how as a woman in seafood, where mostly men are found in these roles, honestly, that, you know, seafood buyer and, slash, retailer. What's that like for you? I realize this is a huge question, but feel free to just say a few things, whatever comes to mind.

Daisy Berg [00:32:47] It's different. I'm not as young as I used to be, but when I was younger and definitely looked a lot younger. I'm also kind of short and petite, we'll say. I think that it really threw people off when they met me. I get to visit a lot of producers. I go into the production plants. I go to the docks. I get to visit with fishers. I get to visit with people that work in all of these production facilities. And I get to meet GMs at all of these places and I think it really throws them off when they meet me and I'm not really what they're expecting. I try to conduct myself in a way that stays positive and knowledgeable and also doesn't back down. I certainly perform my function a little bit differently, like I alluded to before, by price not being one of the main factors in my decision making, and I make sure that they understand that about me and that I really just want to know the process. I want to know about their products. I want to know about their species. And I want them to know that I'm going to potentially ask some hard questions towards the end. That's kind of how I've conducted. I'm not saying it's easy. It's definitely been an uphill road to be a woman in this industry, and I do feel like there is change on the horizon, but it has been a slow one.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:14] As you know, SAGE is about building gender equality and empowering people in the seafood industry. You mentioned the road has been hard, but you see change on the horizon. So I want to know in your experience, what are one or two aspects of the industry and its culture that may contribute to the inequality? And what are some things that the industry can do to lessen these inequalities? What do you see now like in your journey? What's hopeful on the horizon that things are changing? Like what can the industry do more of to change these things?

Daisy Berg [00:34:45] I was contemplating this question and I have been since listening to your first podcast and thinking about how I would answer. I think I'm going to answer it with a story. I was sitting at lunch with a GM of a company and he said to me, You know, Daisy, you're the first woman that I've had a private lunch with. And in my business, I do not meet one on one with women out of respect for women and out of respect for my wife. And I was really puzzled by the comment. I didn't really know what to think. And I thought, should I be flattered or is this something else? I'm really confused. So I left. We continued with our business meeting. I left the meeting and I continued to think about it over the next few days. And then I realized I'm just a person that's here working in the seafood industry and for you to see women as anything different than your equal to discriminate against us in a way that makes you think that you're flattering me by saying that, it's time to reframe your outlook. I'm just a person.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:01] Yeah. Were you having dinner with Mike Pence? I mean, it literally sounds like something Mike Pence would say, right?

Daisy Berg [00:36:07] Hilariously close.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:09] That's really odd thing to say. I don't even know what to say about that. Okay, let's just break it down for a second. So that's that guy's personal M.O., right? He doesn't have lunch with women, you know, individual women. Okay, that's great. But what about a systemic thing? What within the system allows a guy like that to say something like that? Right? I think it has to do with the fact also that there aren't that many women in these positions that you have, that you're operating in. Right?

Daisy Berg [00:36:35] Right. What I found is there are more women now in positions that are what I'm going to call middle management positions like mine or an account rep or a sales rep at big distributors. They definitely exist. Now, when you go beyond that into the leadership team, there are very few and it just becomes smaller and smaller and smaller. I mean, you can look at any sort of speaking panel or board of seafood business. There are very few women and there's very little diversity on their board when there is, I was listening to a podcast years ago and I believe that it was a former CEO from a big company, it might have been Pepsi or one of those larger corporations, and she said, that here's the thing. When a woman becomes the CEO of a company, a lot of times it's because the company is not doing well and it's less attractive for a male executive to come in and more likely that they'll be able to get a female in the role because this might be their first position at this executive level. The woman comes in, fixes the company, and then they're gone. And they're replaced with a male. So socially, I think we're the fixers. But I think that that has to change. I think we have to be seen as just people. Yeah. The example of the lunch with one man is just that systemic thing that's in all of these companies or in the industry as a whole. We're just people.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:10] Yeah, that's a really good point. I've heard that story too, about women coming in in the time of crisis and fixing it and then they get ousted or whatever. I think that's a real shame. This kind of leads me to my next question. How can SAGE support you as a woman in the industry? And I mean, I think you're familiar with some of the things that we've planned. I'm curious your thoughts.

Daisy Berg [00:38:30] Your one thing that I have always had difficulty with is understanding the transparency or lack of transparency and salaries and those statistics. I think that women continue to be underpaid in the industry and in most industries, and I would be really interested to see more data on that. I'm excited about some things that you and I have talked about privately, about putting

together a panel of people that are available for speaking engagements. Being a person that came from a really small town and I used to be so terrified and so shy to speak in front of people. I'm now really excited by it and I love doing it. I love sharing my journey through the seafood industry and I want to do more of it and networking.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:39:16] We've got both of those things happening, like you mentioned. We're calling it the Speaker's Bureau for the Seafood Sector, so we're launching that soon. It's going to be, like you said, a platform where people can sign up, they can put their profile on there, kind of show what their expertise is, and there will be no more excuses for having panels, which are all male panels at any seafood conference, event, webinar or whatever in the future, because this is going to be your readymade solution to find experts that do not look like the usual people that are on these panels that we see so often. So that's super exciting. And of course The Bloom will be launching soon also, which is the networking community. I know you'll participate in both, so I'm really excited for that.

Daisy Berg [00:40:02] Absolutely. I'm very excited about them too. And I just love the idea of connecting more of us and putting together tools so that there is no excuse.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:40:11] Yeah, and I think that's great what you said about salary transparency and how can we shine more light on that? I don't know the answer to that, but I think the good thing about what we're doing is that a lot of industries have already done this, that or the other. And so we can look to other industries to see how they've done things and replicate that. I got a lot on my plate right now. So soon, hopefully something about that will happen as well. I hope so, this podcast, as you know, is to inspire people working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector. And you really represent the woman that I hope listens to The Conch. So what advice would you give to people already in the business or thinking about starting a career in this exciting sector?

Daisy Berg [00:40:54] The thing that I find most exciting about this sector and how I try to bring people into it is to remind them that the knowledge is never ending. If you're a person that craves knowledge and exciting changes in a fast paced world, this is the world for you. It's so exciting that there are 500 plus species that you can learn about and so many different waterways and so many different ways to raise fish and harvest fish. It's the most exciting part of my job.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:41:28] That's a really great point. I mean, you can choose to be either hyper local, like what's in your backyard or what's down the street or what's down the road. Or global, right? I mean, there's a million things you can learn and become an expert in or just a generalist. It's really an exciting career.

Daisy Berg [00:41:44] It sure is.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:41:44] So, as you know, SAGE is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood industry. And this podcast is one of the main ways we're doing this. So I'd love to give you the opportunity to uplift someone. Could be anyone. So who would you like to uplift and why?

Daisy Berg [00:41:59] I would like to uplift Sarah Baker. She currently works with Forever Oceans. I met her lots of years ago. She was pretty young in the industry, and Sarah is a complete go getter. She throws herself into the companies that she works for and into constant learning. She has grown so much in the time that I've known her, and I'm so excited to see what she continues to

do. In addition to that, I just need to give a quick shout out and I'm just going to list some people that I've worked with over the years at New Seasons. Samantha, Kelly, Dani, D, Tana, Joelle, Rachel, Teri, Linda, Jess and Kit down in California. These are just a few of the great women that I've had the pleasure of working with.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:42:43] Excellent shout outs around Sarah Baker I agree with that. She's a gem. I know Sarah also very well, and I am also excited to follow her journey, which, you know, honestly, she's been in it for a while, but it's really just beginning. That's a great shout out for a great woman. How can our listeners find you or rather, New Seasons, online?

Daisy Berg [00:43:03] You can find New Seasons at newseasonsmarket.com. We have a very robust Instagram and so follow us there. You can find me on LinkedIn. I will also be speaking at Aquaculture America in New Orleans in a few weeks. I will be attending Seafood Expo North America in Boston. And beyond that, you can find me behind the counter of New Seasons market locations doing what I love.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:43:27] That's awesome. One more question before we go. What's the newest, hottest thing in seafood that's coming to the shelves of these seasons?

Daisy Berg [00:43:34] Well, a couple of things. One, we launched a specialty tinned fish section, which is close to the seafood market, and that has been really exciting to go from products that go bad in three days to stuff that's good for three years. So that's very exciting for all of us. Secondly, we are going to launch in the beginning of April, Oregon Seaweed. They raised dulse down at the Oregon coast on land in tanks, and we're really excited. The consumers don't really know where to find fresh seaweed or what to do with it. And so we're going to put it not only in the seafood case, but also in the produce section. We're going to set them up separately and see where customers gravitate towards it. I'm really excited about that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:44:18] That's super exciting because I actually am really interested in where they will gravitate towards as well. Because it's a vegetable.

Daisy Berg [00:44:25] It's a vegetable. There's a group that's trying to change the name and call them sea veggies. Which I think is a great way to think about it.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:44:31] Either in the produce case or in the seafood case. I think it's great. I can't wait to see where actually it resonates with people. And so I just want to thank you, Daisy, for being my friend, for sharing your wealth of knowledge coming on the program. And I look forward to seeing you again very soon.

Daisy Berg [00:44:50] Thank you so much for having me on Julie. This has been so much fun.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:44:55] Thank you for tuning into The Conch podcast. It would be amazing if you could take just 2 seconds to leave a review and share this podcast with your ocean loving friends. Thank you.

Crystal Sanders-Alvarado [00:45:09] The Conch podcast is a program of Seafood and Gender Equality, or SAGE. Audio production, engineering, editing, mixing and sound design by Crystal Sanders-Alvarado for Seaworthy. The theme song "Dilation" is written and performed by Satan's Pilgrims. Funding for The Conch podcast is generously provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Builders Initiative.