

The Conch Sz2Ep5 LindaCornishFINAL.mp3

Julie Kuchepatov [00:00:04] Hello. My name is Julie Kuchepatov and I'm the host of this podcast, the Conch. We are grooving along on our journey with this podcast, talking about seafood and the ocean. And most importantly, we're showcasing some of the most incredible women working in the seafood sector, sharing their journeys, examining the challenges they face and the triumphs they've achieved. I've been waiting to have this next guest on as she is a real inspiration to me, and so I'm delighted to welcome Linda Cornish. Linda is the president of the Seafood Nutrition Partnership, a nonprofit organization inspiring a healthier America through a balanced diet that includes seafood. She has held leadership and management positions with several large corporations, namely Harrah's Entertainment, Hitachi Consulting and Arthur Andersen, and is a co-founder of the Memphis Farmers Market, which we are definitely going to talk about, I hope. So welcome, Linda, and thank you for joining me today on the Conch. And let's get down to business.

Linda Cornish [00:01:00] Thank you, Julie. Thanks for having me today.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:03] Yeah, you're welcome. I'm really excited to hear more about your relatively recent move to Memphis, I think, so I think you're kind of going back to your farmer's market roots. Is that right?

Linda Cornish [00:01:11] Yes, yes. Yeah. We lived here about ten years ago and with the ability to work from home, we decided to move back to our old neighborhood here in Memphis, Tennessee.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:21] That's awesome. Have the prices changed significantly in housing since you were there last?

Linda Cornish [00:01:26] Oh, yes, yes. It's made me wish that we held on to our last home because prices have definitely gone up.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:01:32] I bet. I bet. Well, I'm really excited, like I said, to have you on the program because you definitely were an inspiration to me when I was starting SAGE and you had some really great advice. And so I'm thrilled to have you on and learn a little bit more about your background and maybe you could fill us in a little bit about your background and how you ended up to where you are today at Seafood Nutrition Partnership?

Linda Cornish [00:01:54] Sure. Yeah. You know, I didn't have a direct path to seafood. I'm not sure who does, actually. But, you know, I started out as a business and accounting major and I wanted to do consulting and help businesses succeed. And so I spent after graduating with an MBA from UCLA, I spent about a decade working in consulting to help businesses succeed in strategy, competitive analysis, and technology. And through that process, I ended up going to the entrepreneurial path, and I started a tea import business at that point to try and figure out how to help people be healthier, relax and get some more time in their day. And after that it's like, okay, people are not drinking tea fast enough. I need to figure out something else to do. And so at that point, my husband and I actually moved from Los Angeles to Memphis, Tennessee for his job. And so I had the opportunity here to work for one of my consulting clients, which is Harrah's Entertainment. They had a location here in Memphis and then here in Memphis after Harrah's, I went to the Chamber of Commerce membership in town, and in my volunteer time, I helped to start the Memphis Farmers Market. And then another job move for my husband took us to Washington, D.C.

And after turning around a nonprofit in education, I saw this opportunity to form a nonprofit for the seafood industry around educating people about the health benefits of seafood. And so that's really the background. I formed this nonprofit nine years ago, and it's been a great adventure ever since.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:03:47] So what was the opportunity that you saw for the nutrition angle, for the seafood?

Linda Cornish [00:03:52] Yeah. At that point, the National Fisheries Institute had wanted to find somebody to start a nonprofit educating Americans about the health benefits of seafood. And so they called it the Seafood Education Foundation. They wanted to find someone to start it from scratch. And my Memphis farmer's market experience really stood out to them because it was a way to connect people to the health benefits of eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than just local produce that they thought be great in terms of helping Americans find a way to eat more seafood. So it started as an idea at National Fisheries Institute, and then I made it as their executive director for that nonprofit and brought it to life.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:39] So you really took the reins on that from a small idea at NFII, the National Fisheries Institute, and just grew it. And nine years, I didn't realize it.

Linda Cornish [00:04:49] Yeah. It formed in February of 2013.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:04:53] Wow, congratulations. That's really something. I'm saying that from the bottom of my heart. As someone who was working on my own initiative for, I guess, not even two years yet and it just seems like a lifetime already, right?

Linda Cornish [00:05:08] Oh, my gosh. You know, seafood has a way of getting a hold of you and taking you for a ride.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:05:16] It really does. And that's why, you know, that was one of the trends that emerged from our discussions in season one of the podcast was that a lot of people stay in the industry because they really love the industry. They love seafood, they love the ocean and they love people. So it's true. I mean, it grabs you and it won't let you go.

Linda Cornish [00:05:33] Yeah. You know, seafood and the whole seafood industry is something I think that not a lot of Americans are aware of. And so once you're in the industry, you enter this world that is amazing. You know, the health benefits of seafood are so prominent and tremendous for all of us. And then you're right, the people in this industry are fantastic. There are thousands and thousands of companies in this industry and everybody is just colorful characters.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:02] Yeah, you're right. And you said the same thing that I say is that I didn't have a direct path into this industry either. And so I think you fall into it and then you meet these colorful characters and then you're hooked, literally, pun intended. So tell me why nutrition and what's the kind of link between messaging around seafood and its nutritional benefits and what are its nutritional benefits? Because I do know them. And by the way, I should mention that SAGE and I are a member of Seafood Nutrition Partnership and work with you on co-creating messaging that you use in your campaign Eat Seafood, America! So I'm just curious like what's the quick kind of message around nutrition and seafood and why it's so important?

Linda Cornish [00:06:43] You know, seafood is one of the most studied nutrients in the scientific community. And I think that's something that maybe a lot of folks in the seafood industry might not know.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:06:53] No.

Linda Cornish [00:06:53] On the other end of the seafood nutrition science, there is a whole body of researchers and research that have been done for the last 40 years on the health benefits of seafood and omega-3s. There are over 40,000 studies on the health benefits of seafood because it's something that you can actually conduct studies and observational studies and see how a nutrient can be beneficial for heart health and now more prominently brain health. And so that's why a lot of scientists are interested in studying the omega-3 fatty acids. And so when I formed the Seafood Nutrition Partnership and I started to get introduced to the scientists that studied seafood and omega-3s, I opened a whole world where they were just waiting for somebody to communicate the health benefits to Americans because most of them have been in the academic field for like two to three decades. And they found it challenging to try and get that message to consumers. And so I was amazed that all the doors that opened for me in the scientific community because they had that desire to get the information out. And so the main benefits for seafood for why it's important is it's seafood and omega-3s are just a vital part of every cell in our body and it's part of the cell membrane. And so they're mostly found in higher concentrations in key organs like our brains, our eyes, and our heart. And so when we eat seafood, omega-3s at least twice a week or more and get our omega-3 index to 8% or higher, you see just such a significant reduction in heart disease risk and a potential for higher IQ for children. And of course, that's the age, stronger brain longevity. And so it's just such a key nutrient for all of us to really make sure is in our diets. And so I think as I formed the Seafood Nutrition Partnership and learned more about the science, I thought, everybody needs to know about this. It's just a key component of our diet. And so in an elevator pitch, I would just say that seafood is just vital for our health. It's also vital for our planet's health, and it's also great for economic security. So it really checks the box for a lot of the global issues that we're facing today.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:09:28] Well, it sure does. And I absolutely 100% agree with you. Let me ask you a question about something you said around the omega-3 index. Is that something that's taken by your doctor, like in a blood test? Or how do you know when your omega-3 index is?

Linda Cornish [00:09:41] Yeah, you can actually ask the doctor to measure your omega-3 level. And there are also several at-home test kit providers like OmegaQuant. And another one, I'm not going to remember all the names, but I do use OmegaQuant. And so they measure the omega-3s in the red blood cells. And so you have an 8% omega-3 or more in your red blood cells, your risk for sudden cardiac death is 90%, you know, less than someone with like a 2% index. And so there are studies about this to show how it's beneficial to have a higher omega-3 index and how much healthy can be if you have more of these fatty acids in your blood.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:10:29] Well, that to me sounds like a perfect argument for why we should be eating seafood constantly. And, you know, I think you mentioned the recommendation is at least twice a week, but probably you can't go wrong eating more, right?

Linda Cornish [00:10:43] Right. No, you can't go wrong eating more. And, you know, one of the reasons that we formed this is that dietary guidelines do want Americans to eat seafood at least twice a week or eight ounces a week, which would be 26 pounds per year. And when we first formed in 2013, only one in ten Americans were eating seafood twice a week or more. And before the pandemic, it got to about one in four Americans. And I think now about one in three American adults are eating seafood twice a week now after the pandemic. So COVID really helped people to figure out that they value health and they understood the health benefits of seafood. But also, I think they missed it at restaurants and they decided to cook more at home. So we did see more demand for seafood during this time.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:11:30] Yeah, I guess you can call that a little bit of a silver lining out of this whole mess of the pandemic of those two years. You mentioned a theme that comes up often also in these podcasts is almost like an inability to tell their science what they've learned through research or share their research in ways that can be messaged clearly and in nuggets that people can understand, like common non-science people can understand. That happens a lot. And so, you know, I was going to ask you about the challenges you faced when you started your nonprofit, but I think I would actually like to understand more about, you know, you opened the door to this vast, really significant research and what's been the challenge around making this messaging and making it really accessible and understandable for just the regular person? Like, you know, a lot of people might not even understand, like, have any idea what omega-3 is. So, like, has that been a challenge for you?

Linda Cornish [00:12:22] You know, it's been a journey in terms of finding that right communications bridge to the consumer. And I think when we understand the wonderful science, we want to take each person aside and say, do you know your omega-3 index? Have you eaten your seafood twice a week? Do you know these stats that if you eat seafood at least twice a week, your risk of sudden cardiac death goes down by 30 to 50%? I mean, we throw a lot of stats at consumers, but over time, as we kept working with our different public health campaigns regionally, we found that it's really important to meet consumers where they are and understand what challenges they're having in their lives. And so for the mom, for the dad or the kids, it could be I'm busy. I don't have time to cook. What can I do to help my kids do better in school? And so, you know, it boils down to seafood helps you feel better. Seafood helps your kids to have better focus in school. And so by taking the science, we have to find a way to connect to the consumer the issues that they face every day. And so it's been fine tuning that messaging these last nine years. And I think we've gone there. And I think part of the success is seeing people really resonating with the messages around the health benefits of seafood, but it took a while to get there, honestly, because we wanted to throw the book of science at people, and they're like, no, I just want to know what's for dinner.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:49] Yeah. Yeah. And that is absolutely the same message that we got from the most recent podcast featuring Julie Qiu, who I think is a Seafood Nutrition Partnership Ambassador, right?

Linda Cornish [00:13:57] She is yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:13:58] Yes. Okay. All roads come back to you, apparently. But she was on the most current episode that's out right now. And she mentioned in her work as the director of marketing for Australis, marketed as The Better Fish. She also was like, you know, the consumer really wants to be able to come home, have something that's good,

healthy and easy. Right. And so seafood does really, like you said, check a lot of those boxes. And, you know, one thing I mentioned a lot on this podcast that, you know, I follow people on social media and you're very active on social media, which I love, because you're also like on Instagram, you post photos of things that you made and you talk about fish sticks. And I love fish sticks. So are fish sticks a good choice? A good, healthy choice?

Linda Cornish [00:14:39] Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:14:41] Let's set the record straight.

Linda Cornish [00:14:42] Fish sticks are a great choice. They're not the fish sticks from 20 years ago. There's been a lot of innovation in terms of, you know, creating great tasting fish sticks. And also, by the way, there is the introduction of the air fryer. Let's just take a pause there and that I think everybody in America should get one and put some fish sticks in there and give it a try.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:02] I actually don't have one. And I do. I know I'm totally behind the times. I really want one. And I saw someone made a recipe the other day, like, now I can't remember what it was, but it looked so delicious. I'll look into it.

Linda Cornish [00:15:12] Okay.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:15:13] Yeah. Thank you for setting the record straight on fish sticks because I agree, I love fish sticks and I think it's so funny when I was actually looking for some last night in my freezer and I didn't have any. So it's a good reminder. So in terms of the Seafood Nutrition Partnership, you have like we already talked about your Eat Seafood, America! campaign and those are conducted kind of regionally. And then correct me if I'm wrong. So you are also incubating what's called the National Seafood Council to conduct a national seafood marketing campaign, very similar, right, to the Eat Seafood, America! campaign. And the goal is to kind of galvanize the industry in an effort to secure \$25 million from Congress for this campaign. And in an email which I got from you, I think you say, "It's time for seafood to tell its own story and improve the image of seafood for consumers." So tell me about the council and this sounds like another one of those opportunities that you generated based on some sort of research, right, that was released. And I'd like you to tell me more because you actually know better. And so where is it now in terms of development and like securing that \$25 million? That's so interesting and amazing. So I'd love to hear more.

Linda Cornish [00:16:22] Yeah. So, you know, it goes back to the start of the pandemic. At that point we were called upon by many of our donors within the industry to help generate consumer demand. At that point, a lot of the restaurants started to close and the demand for seafood was very uncertain. And so we formed the Eat Seafood, America! Consumer facing campaign, which you are a part of Julie, thank you so much. And at that point, we had invited all of our nonprofit partners to come together to help tell the story about seafood together and its health benefits. So with the goal of helping consumers stay healthy and helping the seafood industry survive. And to date, we have over 50 nonprofits, and we've been working together for over two years now, Julie, so this is amazing. And so that Eat Seafood, America! campaign really was an example of how we can all come together and get behind a common message about how to help consumers get into the seafood category. And then I think around July of 2020, NOAA's Marine Fisheries Advisory Council (MFAC) came out with a report on whether it was time to start a national seafood council or a national seafood marketing campaign. And we thought well, that is fantastic,

you know, we really should have a national seafood marketing campaign. There hasn't been one for 30 years. And other food groups have these campaigns to promote the category, and they do really well. And seafood just hasn't had one. And so I think in October of 2020, the Department of Commerce said, we got the report from NOAA, this is great. We hope to see what happens next. And then it kind of just sat there. And so we at Seafood Nutrition Partnership thought we need to make sure that that idea that came out from NOAA's MFAC committee comes to life. And so we read through it. We thought that would be great. And then formed a National Seafood Council task force to continue to build interest within the seafood industry to bring a national seafood marketing campaign together and come to life. And so while we at SNP are securing more funding to expand the Eat Seafood, America! campaign, the task force that's forming a National Seafood Council, it doesn't exist today. It's just in the formation stage. We are working to galvanize the industry to lend their voice and tell Congress that we need \$25 million a year to fund a national marketing campaign. And we started that effort last year and got the awareness out that we wanted this support from Congress, but we did not secure funding from FY 22. And so we're working on galvanizing the industry to lend their voice to secure funding in FY 23. And that seems to be going much better this year. We're sending letters to different members of Congress in every state so far have secured over 160 signatures from the seafood industry. And so those letters actually go directly to members of Congress. When you sign up on our Seafoodcampaign.org website, you sign a letter. It goes directly to the members of Congress. And so they're starting to take notice that all these people are sending them letters to support this campaign idea. So we may be successful for FY 23, but it's still to be seen how it goes this year.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:19:58] Yeah, that's amazing. I think there's a lot of momentum in kind of Washington at the federal level around seafood and fishing and fish farming, I think more than I've ever seen. Is that a fair statement?

Linda Cornish [00:20:11] I think so and I think that probably came from the results of the pandemic, where Washington finally was able to see how critical the seafood industry is to the entire food system and how we came through to meet the needs when the other food groups might have had some challenges. In meat production, when that happened, seafood came and stepped in and so I'm really pleased to see a lot of activity around fisheries right now on Capitol Hill.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:20:40] Yeah, when you say that, like seafood stepped in, gave me this image in my head like a fish is like move over bacon, here I am coming in. Step aside. You've got problems with your supply chain. And just to clarify, like a National Seafood Council and its national seafood marketing campaign, that would be something akin to like the pork industry's "other white meat" type of slogan or the milk industry's "got milk." Yeah, right. Right. Those are very similar. Right. And so, I can't imagine having to come up with some sort of catchy slogan for just the seafood industry. You got your work cut out for you.

Linda Cornish [00:21:16] Well, I mean, so far we've been able to use Eat Seafood, America!

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:19] Yeah.

Linda Cornish [00:21:20] And that is a very nuanced message where we can all agree to, you know, Julie, there's so many different species in the seafood category. I think there's over 1500 species available commercially that people can actually buy. And, you know, you've got the wild and farmed, domestic and imported, and all different species. And so

the Eat Seafood, America! tagline is actually something that everybody can get behind. And so that may be it, but I think as we form the National Seafood Council, we do have a subcommittee right now working on the marketing strategy. And so it is a lot of work to try and come up with the right tagline.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:21:59] Yeah. How many people are on your task force did you say? I think you said.

Linda Cornish [00:22:03] There's 42 companies now on the task force.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:22:06] How is that in terms of coming to decisions? Are they're just advising you and then you ultimately make these decisions or how does that work?

Linda Cornish [00:22:13] So we're working on different projects in a subcommittee format. So we have a marketing subcommittee. There's a government relations subcommittee and then a governance subcommittee. And so each of the task force can volunteer on what they want to work on. And it's been very collaborative and it's a huge undertaking. And so I think everybody is just putting in their thoughts and ideas, which is great. And then I know you were at the Boston Seafood Show in March. We had some great presentations there and a town hall. And I knew that it was gaining momentum when we had a standing room only town hall, one of the sessions. So it's working and it's really satisfying to see that people are coming together and collaborating on something that can help the industry get the awareness out to consumers.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:23:01] Yeah, I totally agree. And it is in the benefit of every one of these companies. And I have to say, you know, the seafood industry, another thing about it is and I'm not sure how it stacks up to other industries, but it's extremely collaborative, like you said. And there are numerous pre- competitive collaborations that really, you know, work together on issues and try to move the dial on, be it sustainability or be it around a certain species or around a certain theme. So I definitely give the industry credit for rallying together and kind of putting aside their competition and their competitiveness to really work on some things and especially around this, which is to the benefit of literally everybody. So, you know, I have a question because in doing research in preparation for our conversation, I did read a criticism about the National Seafood Council and that it's the marketing campaign, which I understand fully, that it's all in development and it's at the subcommittee level discussions. Right. So the criticism is that this campaign will encourage people to eat seafood rather than only domestic American seafood, which was a recommendation in the report that you spoke of, and I can't remember the acronym for that group.

Linda Cornish [00:24:11] It was a NOAA MFAC report.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:24:12] NOAA MFAC, okay. Thanks. And the recommendation came out of that report. So how do you respond to this criticism?

Linda Cornish [00:24:21] Well, I think that's a very valid question. And the way that I would address that is that as Seafood Nutrition Partnership and our charitable mission is to promote the health benefits of eating seafood. The level of reach that we can have and the messaging that we can focus on is really at the level of public health and the health benefits of seafood. So it's not picking one side or the other. It's speaking about seafood at the public health level. And so we're not even addressing domestic or imported. We're talking about at the highest level of agreement for the industry, which is the health benefits

of seafood. And I think part of this is coming from our experience with consumer education and how consumers view campaigns. You know, consumers are looking for things that are going to be helpful to their lives and help them to eat better and function better. And I think other campaigns that do the "eat this, not that" type of approach, have not been that helpful for consumers. That actually causes more confusion. And so, yes, the NOAA MFAC report landed on promoting domestic seafood, but since SNP is taking this idea forward, our ability to communicate seafood is it can only get to the public health level. We can't get to really the sourcing level. And that's where we need to actually collaborate as we are doing right now on the Eat Seafood, America! campaign with other regional marketing campaigns. And so that's where we can have the ability for each region the U.S., like Alaska, Maine, the Gulf, to continue to really promote their seafood and collaborate with each other. And so, Julie, it just comes from I think that report was an idea. And then now we're actually trying to make it come alive and we have to bake in the realities of how current marketing works within the seafood industry and what each organizations do.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:26:28] Yeah, that's a really good response, I think, to that criticism. And I think, you know, it's also really important to note that much of the seafood that we eat in the U.S. is imported. And so, you know, yes, working with those regional marketing groups, like you mentioned in the Gulf and in Maine and in Alaska, like supporting them is important and supporting domestic production. But the reality is that most of our seafood comes from somewhere else.

Linda Cornish [00:26:53] Yeah. And I think, you know, as we grow demand for seafood in the U.S., domestic seafood can only mean so much about that demand and seafood as a global industry. And so we really need to just make sure that consumers understand that first, our goal is to help consumers as part of this national seafood marketing campaign is to get into the seafood category. And once consumers are there, every region can continue to really share their message about why their seafood is great. But I think right now our role is to serve as the umbrella campaign and move people into the seafood section of the supermarket or the restaurant menu. So it's just a different type of campaign than some of the other regional campaigns.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:27:38] Yeah, I totally agree. And I think you're right. It's a door opener for these kind of regional campaigns, as you said. I'm curious around this \$25 million, how did you come to that number? Because I'm wondering, the reason why I'm asking is because I imagine, like the pork and the beef industry, they have exponentially more millions. I could be wrong, but I'm just curious about that number.

Linda Cornish [00:27:58] Oh, no, you're exactly right. Milk has about \$300 million a year.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:01] What!

Linda Cornish [00:28:02] And pork about \$70 million. Avocados about \$50 million a year. And so \$25 million is just a start. And so it was recommended as an amount in the MFAC report. And so I think in today's digital communications capabilities, I think we can work smarter and more effectively with that amount of money now than we could previously. And so I think we can get pretty far ahead with \$25 million, but we can of course use more than that.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:28:33] Yeah, I mean, \$300 million for milk. Like I mean, I don't want to get off on a tangent here, but like if you think about the number of plant based milks,

different types of milks that have come online, like I'm wondering 300 million, that's a huge amount of money to spend on marketing milk.

Linda Cornish [00:28:50] Yeah. So other food groups actually have a checkoff program and so the industry pays into those marketing funds. And so those funds are actually supported by companies. It's not a direct government funding. And so it's a little bit different. Seafood doesn't have that. And so we're asking for help from the government to get it started. And hopefully the seafood industry will see what a great success this is and pay into it at some point in some innovative way. Yeah, we're just asking for help to get it started.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:21] Yeah, well, it sounds like, you know, if you have more than 40 companies working with you, it certainly sounds like you have some good momentum and support behind you.

Linda Cornish [00:29:29] Yeah. Thank you. Yeah, it's great. I think. Gosh, it's really nice to see people come together. And I have to point out that we have companies of all sizes. About half are large companies, half are small companies. And in terms of representation of people on the task forces, it's about half women and half men and pretty balanced in terms of wild and domestic. So we've really kept a balanced structure in terms of making sure it's representative of the industry.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:29:58] That's awesome. All right. We're going to switch gears a little bit here. I'm going to ask you kind of some questions about being a woman in the seafood industry, because clearly, that's what I like to know and learn from other women in this industry about and, you know, sharing these experiences and some of the challenges. So, you know, SAGE is about building gender equality and empowering women in the seafood industry. So can you share one or two aspects of the industry and its culture that may contribute to inequality in the sector? And what are some of the things that the industry can do to lessen these inequalities?

Linda Cornish [00:30:35] That's a really great question. You know, I think in terms of the areas where we can help with gender equality is representation at the leadership level. You know, the industry is not diverse. I mean, it's a very white male dominated industry. And I think that comes from just the history of how the seafood industry has grown. And I think there's been a lot of progress made by leaders within industry to find ways to have more women leaders in different positions, in key positions. I feel like the industry is recognizing that and trying to find a way to do that. It could do a lot faster. And I think we just have to ask everybody in the industry to make a concerted effort to identify opportunities for women to have more of a voice and seat at the table. So I think that would be one of the main things to do is just make sure that there's good representation at the table. And we see that within our task force by having half women and a half men at the table get a very diverse point of view and also with the size of companies get a perspective that someone in a small business might have in terms of facing challenges that a large company might not. And so I don't think anyone is doing that in a deliberate way, but we just have to look at the current situation and figure out how to provide more options and opportunities for women and diverse people in industry.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:32:12] Yeah, that's a great answer. And that's great that you have, you know, a lot of gender diversity on the task force and the subcommittees because, you know, we say that means there's going to be a lot of different ideas and innovation and

coming forth from different lived experiences. So I think that's really helpful and I think that's only going to bring more success, I hope, to you.

Linda Cornish [00:32:32] Oh, I'm going to just add one more opportunity, if you don't mind. I think it would be great to see also more women business owners within the seafood industry, and I think that would produce more CEOs that are women within the industry. And so for those that are investing in seafood companies or seafood ventures, I think it would be a good really opportunity to expand women's role in the seafood industry by investing in them as well as owners in these businesses.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:33:05] Yeah, that's a really great point and one that I don't think anyone's brought up before because, you know, it's interesting, you and I talked a long time ago. I mentioned that, you know, I was consulting with you prior to starting SAGE or during the development of SAGE, and we talked about how the majority and, we never nailed down a direct number, but the majority of companies in the seafood industry are family businesses. And so I mean, a lot of them. Right. So and that means that, you know, their dad started the company, you know, in the twenties or whatever. And then he's passing down this baton of leadership to his sons usually. And so, you know, it's like kind of this perpetual passing the institutional knowledge and the baton of leadership to the son and in these families, in addition to what you said about, you know, women founders and business leaders, maybe also the gentlemen who found these companies they can think about maybe passing it down to women as well.

Linda Cornish [00:33:57] Yeah. Yeah. I think it may be the fact that fishing used to be men at sea and the women are at home, you know, taking care of the home. But I think women are tough and they can really any part of the business. And so I think we need to give every woman a chance in terms of every role that there is in the company.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:34:16] Yeah, totally agree. And I just wanted to flag that yesterday a report came out from the World Benchmarking Alliance. I don't know if you've had a chance to read that, Linda, but it's the Seafood Stewardship Index reported. So essentially it looks at 30 leading companies, this index, and then it conducts an analysis on issues such as social responsibility, environmental sustainability, traceability, illegal fishing, and governance. And there was a gender equality and women's empowerment piece in there that they looked at, and they concluded that out of the 30 companies, 90% of them do not have a commitment to support gender equality and women's empowerment in their supply chains. And only 60% of the companies do not have a public commitment, nor disclosed any information on how they are performing on gender equality. So that's my challenge to the industry, is that, you know, first of all, let's make a commitment, but, you know, this is the decade for action, right? So let's put some action also behind those commitments. And then also let's look at our supply chains because 90% of the companies do not have a commitment to support gender equality and empower women in their supply chains. So that means they're not leveraging their influence. So these companies aren't leveraging their influence that they have through their sourcing over, you know, things that happen in the supply chain. So I really want to challenge the industry to that and take a look at how they can not only commit to gender equality and empowering women, but also put action behind those commitments.

Linda Cornish [00:35:40] You know, Julie, I think one way that we can help to incentivize the industry to have more gender equality and put it into their policies is to point that it's good for the bottom line, that, you know, when you have more diversity of talent and employees, it actually produces better ideas, maybe better cost savings, better revenue

generating ideas that so, you know, it's actually just better for the bottom line. And I think companies that do that and show business cases that you'll see others come on board to actually make that an intentional choice and intentional decision. We have to be intentional in terms of putting equity and inclusion into our company practices.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:36:30] Of course. Absolutely. Well said. Thank you. How do you, as a woman in seafood, kind of navigate this predominantly male industry? And how can SAGE or I help you as a woman in seafood? Is there anything that you would like to see more of from me? And what are some tips?

Linda Cornish [00:36:50] I think this industry is very relationship oriented. And I think for me in terms of navigating this industry, it's been just a step by step of building trusted relationships along the way. And there are so many fantastic male leaders in this industry that have opened their doors for me to meet other companies or foundations. And so I think it's about building relationships and showing that you can conduct business in a trusted way and help each other. And I think, you know, I have noticed that women are just more natural communicators and they occupy the social and digital media space more than the male counterparts. And so I guess how SAGE can help is to encourage the men in the industry to get into the conversation about this, to talk about it, and I'm not sure how to do that. Maybe this is how SAGE can help is to encourage the male leaders, the men in this industry, to talk about how they support their women employees and leaders within their company. Because I think hearing those examples and case studies will help people feel like, oh, it's normal to talk about this and really promote each other when we're on the LinkedIn or, you know, at public events, speaking events to support each other. So it's not like a situation where when we talk about gender equality, all the women are saying, yeah, let's talk about gender equality, you know, we really need to find the male champions, if you will, to also help grow that conversation.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:45] Yeah, I totally agree with you on that. And I think you're right. I mean, we had on the podcast in season one Emily De Souza, who's a communicator, a scientist and a communicator and marketer.

Linda Cornish [00:38:57] Seaside with Emily, right?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:38:57] Yes. Seaside with Emily and she mentioned the same thing. Well, very similar thing around what the industry can do to support women more in the industry is put more importance on these jobs around communications and marketing because that's where the majority of the women are found. Right. So don't dismiss those roles as secondary because they are super important. And by the way, your work that you're doing with the National Seafood Council and the marketing campaign, I mean, that's putting, you know, communicators and communication front and center. So that's a really, really great way to show the value of what women are doing specifically around communications and marketing in this industry.

Linda Cornish [00:39:39] Mm hmm.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:39:40] Right?

Linda Cornish [00:39:41] Yeah, that's right. Emily's correct in pointing out that, you know, I think a lot of the communicators are also women as well. And I think that might be as I think about it, the industry hasn't focused a lot on marketing. It's a very transactional type business. And perhaps if they thought more about adding, including more marketing, of

course, and then utilizing the strength of women, and that could help to grow the industry as well. So I think it's interrelated in a lot of ways.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:40:11] I agree. I agree. That's great. Great advice. So this podcast is to inspire women working in or thinking about starting a career in the seafood sector and, you know, really represent the woman that I envision as a listener of the Conch. What advice would you give to women already in the business or thinking about starting a career in this exciting sector? And I realize that, you know, you're kind of on the nonprofit side, but you have a very strong influence around the sector, you know, as an industry, so what would be your advice to women?

Linda Cornish [00:40:42] One thing that I will encourage women who are already in the business or are thinking about starting a career is to really look at the seafood industry. It's definitely an industry that is growing an influence in terms of promoting our health and our future food security. And there are thousands of companies in this industry, as I said before. And so it's really ripe for someone that wants to make a difference in an industry because there'll be a lot of opportunities that some of the other industries have like three or four main companies. But here within the industry of seafood, it's still a very fragmented industry. And so that presents challenges, which presents lots of opportunities. And so I think that's why it's a good time to look into the industry and really help make your mark on how you can make a difference and a great food industry for the U.S. or the world.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:41:37] I think that's really great advice. And I'm curious, we didn't mention your past employment at Harrah's Entertainment, which is the gambling company?

Linda Cornish [00:41:46] Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:41:48] The gaming industry, I should say. Right. Right. How does the seafood industry stack up in terms of in relation to the gaming industry in excitement levels?

Linda Cornish [00:41:57] Well, I was an internal business consultant at Harrah's Entertainment, which is now part of Caesars, and they had a back office operations and IT location in Memphis. That's why I was here. So I didn't spend a lot of time in Las Vegas. But in terms of the industry, from gaming and entertainment to seafood. No, I think the similarities are they're both very regulated. When you deal with food and of course with gaming, you're interacting with a lot of people. And so there's a lot of safety and protection that's provided by both industries. And I guess the other similarities are everybody has a streak of adventure, whether you're on like fishing or you're on the entertainment gaming table. There's a lot of adventure to be had on both sides.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:42:46] Yeah, I had this idea when you said you were in this back room, kind of that you're like wearing a green visor and counting dollars. But that wasn't it, right?

Linda Cornish [00:42:56] No, no, no. It was more IT. It was, you know, trying to figure out different software to put in different locations around the country.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:43:05] Ok, you're ruining my image. You're ruining my mental image. But, you know, another thing that they have in common, by the way, these two

industries, is that both have ties to organized crime. So or at least did, right. So another thing that might be again the...

Linda Cornish [00:43:20] Hence the regulation and protections for consumers.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:43:22] Exactly. And that's another thing that as Crystal and I always say, it's a topic for another podcast. But I did want to ask you one final question, you know, and I ask everybody on the show. So, you know, SAGE is about uplifting and amplifying diverse voices in the seafood industry and this podcast is one of the main ways that we do this. So this is your opportunity to uplift someone. So I would love to know who you would uplift and why.

Linda Cornish [00:43:49] Good question. Let's see? Does it have to be someone that you haven't interviewed yet?

Julie Kuchepatov [00:43:54] No! It can be anyone. Anyone that you think deserves some kudos or a kind word or is working hard behind the scenes. It can be anyone.

Linda Cornish [00:44:03] Can I have more than one. I know. I'm asking for parameters.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:44:06] No, no, no. It's totally fine. You can have more than one, and you can talk about them as much or as little as you want. It's just your opportunity to uplift someone.

Linda Cornish [00:44:16] You know, there are so many women in the seafood industry that are making a difference every day. Some behind the scenes, some up front. But I'm really pleased to see just a lot of leaders just stepping up to share their voice and leading the way. I think three women that come to mind immediately that are starting an effort called Fed by Blue. It's Jennifer Bushman, Jill Kauffman Johnson and Katherine Bryar. And they are starting to form an effort to also help tell the story of seafood through mass media. And so that's something to look out for. I think another person that I'd love to get to know better is Imani Black. She is a founder of Minorities Aquaculture and has been focused on helping to provide education around how to get started in the seafood industry for minority women. And so that's really inspirational. Julie Qiu is one that you just interviewed, and I think she's a leader in the oyster field and the seafood industry, and there are so many women that are leading the charge right now. And I'm going to need a whole podcast to name them all. And Julie, you're definitely one. I am just so impressed with you to start SAGE and to see how far you've come from from just an idea. You're already giving voice to so many women already.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:45:42] Well, thank you very much. I appreciate that. And it's so funny because in between your episode, which will air at a date still TBD, we are featuring Imani Black and Jennifer Bushman to tell us more about Fed by Blue and Imani to tell us about Minorities in Aquaculture. So it's perfect that you mention them because you're the sandwich, the other end of the sandwich between you and Julie Qiu. So it's really, really great. And thank you so much for those kind words about me. How can we find you online? Because I know you mentioned if you could just repeat the council website as well as SNP's, that would be great.

Linda Cornish [00:46:18] Yeah. So to find seafood nutrition partnership, go to seafoodnutrition.org and to learn more about the National Seafood Council effort, go to seafoodcampaign.org

Julie Kuchepatov [00:46:31] That's awesome. Thank you so much. So, Linda, thank you so much for being on the program. I again find great inspiration in you and working with your team who, by the way, is also incredible. We should give them a shout out.

Linda Cornish [00:46:43] Yes.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:46:43] Because you have a really wonderful team and there are a lot of fun actually too, I hung out a little bit with them in Boston. So I really appreciate having you on and your efforts to bring the insane benefits of seafood to national attention. And I wish you all the best and I'm always available to support you as I know you are for me. So thank you.

Linda Cornish [00:47:04] Thank you, Julie.

Julie Kuchepatov [00:47:05] 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.

Speaker 3 [00:47:19] 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.