



FISH (Feeding Individuals to Support Health) Project Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What is the FISH Project?** FISH (Feeding Individuals to Support Health) is a collaboration between United Way of Central Maryland, McCormick, The Institute of Marine Environmental Technology (IMET), and JJ McDonnell. This partnership has been developed to positively impact the health of central Maryland region by providing residents in underserved communities with access to healthy food choices, such as high quality sources of protein like fish.
- 2. Why is this project unique?** The opportunity to get the best of the best in a room to collaborate on something special is itself unique. IMET, McCormick and United Way have come together to leverage their expertise, thought leadership and muscle in the community to provide nutritious, high-quality fish to our neighbors who would otherwise not have access.
- 3. What is the overall mission of this initiative?** In many of our communities, individuals and families do not have access or the financial means to purchase and prepare fish, one of the healthiest proteins, for their families. Our goal is to not only break down the barrier to accessing nutritious foods, but to instill the importance of healthy eating to sustain healthy living.
- 4. What need does FISH address?**
 - In central Maryland, more than 319,000 people don't have access to healthy food. When families don't have nutritious foods, it's more difficult to work toward becoming self-sufficient. Kids often have a hard time focusing in school and don't have the energy they need to learn and grow.
 - On top of that, it's likely that low-income families already struggle to afford food. The average Maryland SNAP (food stamps) benefit in place towards ending hunger is only \$30 per week, per person. We all know that the cheapest options aren't always the healthiest.
 - Even if healthy food was affordable, it's hard to get access to it in a food desert. A food desert is an urban neighborhood or rural town without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.
- 5. How long will this initiative last?** This initiative is now entering its second year of progress. With sustained and increased support for the program it will continue and expand the nutritious protein options available.

6. **What kind of fish is currently being harvested?** The FISH Project is currently growing and harvesting bronzini, a Mediterranean sea bass that can be easily prepared using olive oil and seasonings such as garlic, various herbs, sea salt and pepper, and roasted in an oven, stovetop or grill. The sweet-flavored, semi-firm white meat of bronzini tastes similar to red snapper.
7. **Why did you select such a high-end fish to grow?** We have the option to grow and provide other fish species as the program continues. We chose Bronzini for the first round because of the expertise of our scientists in this particular species, and because it is a fish that is easy to prepare and has a mild flavor.
8. **How has the project been funded?** United Way of Central Maryland and McCormick, through their Flavor for Life® initiative, are funding the project. The investment covers the facilities and staffing at IMET to grow and harvest the fish. JJ McDonnell is donating their services to process and package the fish.
9. **How many people are involved in the growing of the fish?** The aquaculture facility is staffed with four full-time employees. Primary care for the fish is provided by a research scientist and two interns from Baltimore Polytechnic Institute that were chosen to help fish husbandry for farming Bronzini while conducting university-level laboratory research experience as an outreach education.
10. **What research is being done on the fish? What will the research gathered from this project do? For science? For the environment?** Half of the world's fish consumption is already produced by aquaculture. Aquaculture has been the fastest growing food production industry in the world. However, aquaculture faces challenges for an environmentally sound and sustainable operation, because large amounts of wastes generated by fish farming cause serious environmental impacts. Land-based "closed" systems, commonly referred to recirculating aquaculture systems (RAS), are receiving more and more attention as a viable long-term sustainable solution to aquaculture as it provides opportunities to reduce water usage and improve waste management. RAS makes intensive fish production compatible with environmental sustainability. IMET scientists have developed the most advanced RAS technology, a fully contained and near zero discharge RAS that conserves and treats water and solid wastes using aerobic and anaerobic microbial-mediated waste treatment bioreactors. The research at IMET supported by this project will facilitate the development and improvement of waste treatment technologies using microbial processes for the next generation aquaculture practices.

11. **How will the fish be distributed?** JJ McDonnell is providing processing and distribution services for The FISH Project. We will be distributing fish to partner non-profits that reach the underserved community directly, like The Franciscan Center and Moveable Feast, as well as the Maryland Food Bank. This includes, cleaning, fileting and vaccum packing. Fish being distributed to local meal programs (like the Franciscan Center), will be fresh, while harvests being delivered to Maryland Food Bank for later distribution will be frozen.
12. **How will people know how to cook the fish?** McCormick will be providing simple recipes utilizing low-cost ingredients, that will be distributed with the fish. In some instances, the fish will be prepared for patrons of meal services. For example, at our launch event at the Franciscan Center, their chefs prepared the fish for distribution during their lunch service.
13. **How often will you have a harvest? How many people will each harvest feed?** We will harvest the fish in multiple sessions for each cycle of 400-600 pounds of fish, over a selected period to feed hundreds of individuals and families. Each growth cycle is approximately 12-14 months to produce full-grown fish.
14. **Is this type of process for growing fish safe? Are they genetically modified?** These fish are not genetically modified. They are grown in ideal conditions to allow for optimal growth rates. The light cycles, salinity, temperature, and feed amounts are carefully calculated and adjusted on a weekly basis to provide the best growing conditions possible for the fish. RAS aquaculture produces the cleanest, safest and healthiest seafood by the most sustainable way.
15. **Is this a clean way to grow fish?** These fish are grown in a pristine water environment that allow for optimal water conditions.
16. **How can people receive fish?** The fish are being distributed in two ways:
 - Meal programs. The Franciscan Center, Tuerk House, and Movable Feast will receive fresh (unfrozen) fish to be prepared and served as a part of their meal programs –
 - Most of the fish, which will be frozen, will be distributed through the Maryland Food Bank Network
17. **What role does each organization have in the process?** More information about each organization's role in the program can be found at <https://imet.usmd.edu/fish>