

STAMFORD ADVOCATE

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FUTURE IN SEAWEED



Tyler Sizemore / Hearst Connecticut Media

SoundWaters Fleet Manager Josh Mayo pulls a line of kelp out of the water to sample from a kelp farm in the Long Island Sound near Great Captain's Island in the waters of Greenwich on Tuesday.

Local organization hopes kelp farming finds market

By Ignacio Laguarda

STAMFORD — Leigh Shemitz doesn't just view kelp as a seaweed that helps clean Long Island Sound. She sees an opportunity to reinvigorate the local marine economy.

Shemitz, the president of Stamford-based SoundWaters, was out on a boat late Tuesday visiting the organization's first kelp farm, put in place just before the winter near Great Captain Island in Greenwich waters.

With her was U.S. Rep. Jim Himes, D-4, who shares her vision of testing the waters in the local market to see if there's potential for kelp business in Stamford.

"I get really excited about these win-wins," Himes said. "By win-wins, I mean better nutrition, better familiarity with a sustainable food source."

Kelp is edible, and can be used to make miso soup, among other dishes,

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U.S. Rep. Jim Himes chats with SoundWaters President Leigh Shemitz on the way to a kelp farm in Long Island Sound near Great Captain's Island in Greenwich waters.

KELP

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but it's main benefit to aquaculture is that it removes excess nitrogen in the water.

Shemitz described the seaweed as "magical."

"It has almost no inputs," she said. "You don't have to fertilize it, you don't have to water it, it just grows."

She envisions a possible future in which kelp farming could become a viable business in Stamford, as long as it can find a market and help people make a reasonable living growing and selling the product.

"It would seem we should be able to do it because we have access to markets here," she said.

One of the benefits is that kelp is an off-season crop, meaning it grows in the wintertime, when traditional farming is limited.

Currently, the kelp farm is located on a site that SoundWaters is leasing in Greenwich waters. Starting later this year, however, they will plant a new kelp farm on a site outside of Stamford Harbor.

The "farms" are just strands of kelp laid along a string held by buoys that are attached to moorings.

"For us, it was great to get started," Shemitz said. "There's a lot of learning that goes on with it."

Shemitz hopes the small kelp growing operation can eventually transform into a "kelp forest." The SoundWaters president said the organization will also have students study the farm and learn firsthand how to maintain it.

"Kelp does a lot of great



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SoundWaters Fleet Manager Josh Mayo pulls a line of kelp out of the water for people to taste. Kelp, a type of seaweed, is a winter crop that has a positive impact on the environment by removing excess nitrogen from the water.

things," Shemitz said.

"We're always combating human impact along the Long Island Sound because we're downstream of so many people."

While she admits that the taste of kelp is acquired, it's become a common in-

gredient in her own cooking. She likes to blanch the kelp to turn it into noodles.

Kelp comes packed with vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin B, calcium, magnesium and iron.

On Tuesday, people on the boat tasted the kelp right out

of the water. Some described it as lettuce-like, while others said it tasted metallic.

Himes said one of the problems facing Stamford, like the rest of the country, is young people eating an unhealthy diet. He sees kelp as a potential asset.

"You engage them in the growing of this stuff, it connects them with their food source," he said.

And, Himes said, the kelp farm comes with a personal benefit as well, as he harvests oysters and clams right around the

corner from where the kelp will be located.

"Anything that cleans this area up is going to create a healthier Himes family too," he said.

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