

Wisconsin Farmers and Gulf Fishermen Link Up to Address Gulf “Dead Zone” Problem

Growing problem creates opportunity for collaboration

Long Beach, MS – In mid-November, commercial fishermen from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama traveled over one thousand miles north to meet with conservation minded farmers in Wisconsin to determine how they can better collaborate to combat the ever growing “Dead Zone” in the Gulf of Mexico.

*“I’ve seen the dead zone first hand both shrimping and fishing in the Gulf. We go from catching fish as fast as we can to seeing absolutely nothing within just one week and it seems to be getting worse every year and moving in to areas we have never seen before,” said **Ryan Bradley, a fifth-generation commercial fisherman from Long Beach, Mississippi and Director of the Mississippi Commercial Fisheries United; a non-profit business alliance of Mississippi fishermen and fishing businesses.** “It is important for fishermen, farmers, and resource managers to meet face to face to discuss these issues so that we can humanize the problem and connect it to those whose livelihoods depend on one another.”*

The workshop was hosted by the Iowa County Uplands Watershed Group, a farmers non-profit that promotes best use farming practices like no-till farming, cover crop planting, stream buffers, and by maintaining tree lines all without the use of toxic sprays. Nine fishermen and over eighty farmers attended the two-day workshop.

*“We can create change when we see the problem head on and connecting fishermen with farmers is a great place to start addressing the problem of the dead zone.” said **Michael Dolan, a 24 year old farmer from Seven Seeds Farm in Spring Green, Wisconsin.***

“Dead Zones” are created when nutrient run-off from fertilizer used on upland farms flows downstream into Gulf watersheds and eventually into the Gulf of

Mexico itself, creating massive algae blooms that deprive the waters of nearly all the available oxygen. Sea life, including important seafood species like shrimp, crabs, red snapper and tuna, that cannot escape these areas quickly drown. A recent Duke University study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences further determined that the hypoxic conditions of the Gulf Dead Zone resulted in stunted shrimp growth, which could have long-lasting impacts with the future shrimp populations.

*“Commercial fishermen are already facing a multitude of threats in the Gulf of Mexico – recreational overfishing, political overreach, reduced access, and proposals to eliminate some commercial fishing – but we need to devote some time to addressing this growing ‘Dead Zone’ problem,” said **David Walker, commercial red snapper fisherman from Andalusia, Alabama.** “This meeting was a great step in the right direction. Fishermen and farmers are a lot alike – we all harvest from the earth, we all provide food for the public, and we all care about leaving the environment better than we found it so our kids can carry on what we do. After spending a few days with these great men and women, I’m pretty confident we can figure out a solution to this problem so that both farmers and fishermen can survive.”*

The Michael Fields Agricultural Institute provides administrative and organizing support for the Uplands Group. Many thanks to Wisconsin Farmers Union, Organic Valley, Strauss Brands, the McKnight Foundation, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, and the many other sponsors and collaborators for supporting this growing connection between Wisconsin farmers and Gulf fishermen.

To read the press release from the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute, click [here](#).

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