



## community development partnership

*Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape*

### Field Point Oysters: Oysters are a family business

***“Oysters are live animals, so that makes us more like ranchers than farmers. We care for our oysters like children.”***

Katie Murphy  
Co-Owner, Field Point Oysters



In early 2013, Mike deVasto and Katie Murphy, approached the CDP for a micro-loan to help them grow their fledgling oyster business. Founded in 2011, Field Point Oyster Farm is located on a grant that had been in Mike's family for over 30 years. A 2 acre farm, located in Wellfleet Harbor at the entrance to the tidal flats between Lieutenant Island and Indian Neck, it is a prime location as there is a plentiful supply of nitrogen and algae that flows through the flats and serves as a good

food source for the oyster beds.

The CDP manages a special loan fund, supported by Wellfleet SPAT (Shellfish Promotion and Tasting) to help shellfish farmers purchase high quality oyster seed and buy new equipment. While the CDP loan was the financial boost they needed, “It was extremely helpful to meet with the CDP's Director of Business & Credit Programs, Pam Andersen, on a quarterly basis to help provide focus on the business and growth and keep an eye on the balance sheet,” says Katie. Today Katie and Mike now produce hundreds of thousands of oysters annually. In addition to their cultivated oysters, which are grown using a French rack and bag system, Mike and Katie also manage a wild oyster reef which helps to propagate oysters for the wild fishery.

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“There is something very special to shell fishing in Wellfleet,” says Mike. “It’s not like a regular job, he says. “Every day of the week is different. It is also one of the few industries in Wellfleet where you can do this year-round.”

Collectively, the oyster farms in Wellfleet Harbor yield around 10 million oysters a year. For Katie and Mike, oystering is very grounding and is tied to a sense of place, noting that in the 1800s Wellfleet was the largest oyster producer in the country. “Oysters are live animals, so that makes us more like ranchers than farmers,” says Katie. “We care for our oysters like children, giving them the space to grow to their maximum potential and each oyster is carefully handled by hand from seed to harvest throughout their 2-3 year life. They are as healthy an oyster as you will ever find.”

While business is good, the industry is subject to numerous challenges. Climate change, diseases such as vibrio, and the seasonal issue of oversaturation where production outgrows demand, are of particular concern. Mike shared that overwintering has become increasingly challenging as the polar vortex has been dipping increasingly farther south, contributing to extreme fluctuations in temperature, which negatively impact the health of the oysters.

Watching their 13 month old daughter Violet play with an oyster shell she has picked up from the moist sand, Katie and Mike see the future of their family. That future is a work in progress. “We would like to diversify,” says Mike, and they are currently looking for a place where they can farm quahogs. Katie mentions that they are also discussing the possibility of farming some on land products such as mushrooms.

Putting down roots in the community is a priority. Mike was recently elected to the Wellfleet Select Board. “Local politics has always been on my radar,” Mike says. In addition to focusing on housing, which Mike sees as “the biggest issue on the Outer Cape,” he notes that “wastewater concerns are right up there.” “The shellfish industry is the largest single industry in the town,” says Mike. “There needs to be a balance of nitrogen mitigation with the industry. The average aquaculture farm is 2.4 acres, which means they are very price sensitive at that scale and cannot weather a big drop in prices. So the challenge is how do you manage growth in such a way that is sustainable?” Mike hopes that the state can play a role in the diversification of species, possibly incentivizing growers to produce more than just oysters, and increase markets.



The CDP is proud to have played a role in helping Field Point Oyster thrive. By helping to nurture their business, we have created an opportunity for a young family to live on the Outer Cape and contribute to the sustainability of our community.