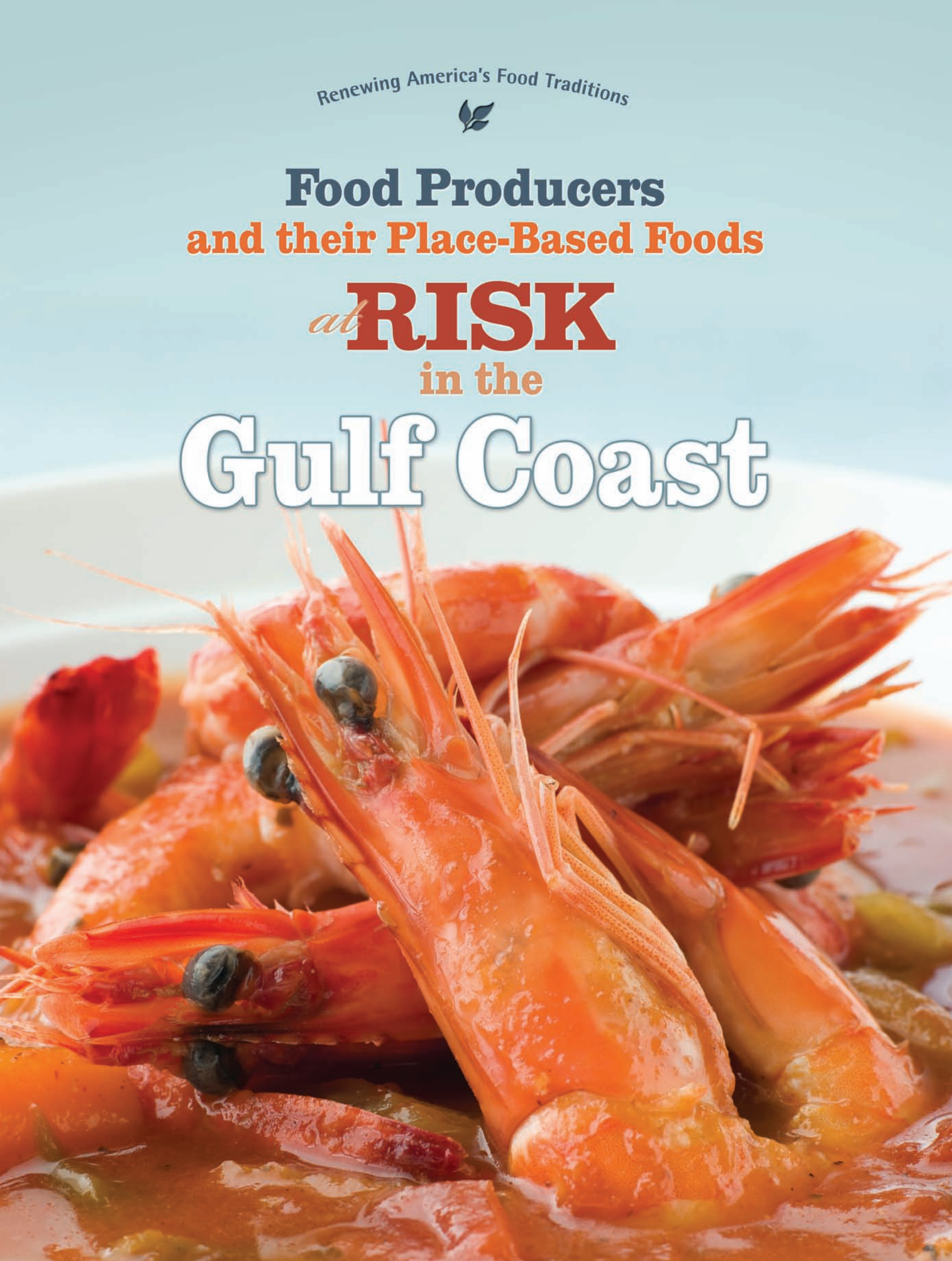
Renewing America's Food Traditions

Food Producers
and their Place-Based Foods
at RISK
in the
Gulf Coast



Vermilionaire:

An inhabitant of Southern Louisiana who benefits from the region's rich culture and environment.

by
Gary Paul Nabhan
Leigh Belanger
Regina Fitzsimmons

BIGSTOCK

VERMILIONAIRE is also the title of a recording by the Lost Bayou Ramblers, a Cajun band from Louisiana whose title track is a traditional song about going down to the bayou to fish, hunt, trap and never die of hunger. As oil pours beneath the surface of the water in the Gulf of Mexico and makes its way to the coast, the families that have lived in close connection to the Gulf's unique habitat continue to be threatened by both man-made and natural pressures.

All along the coast, from the Florida Keys to the mouth of the Rio Grande on the Texas-Mexico border, folks like the Vermilionaires have been forced from their homelands as their jobs have been lost, their lands flooded or contaminated and their properties ruined. Among them, we find some of the most marginalized peoples in the United States: long-term residents such as the Houma, Cajun, Creole, Seminole, Miccosukee, African, Cuban, "Cracker," Choctaw and Creek, as well as immigrants from Sicilian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Central American and Mexican ethnic enclaves.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico has already been called the worst man-made disaster in the history of the United States. But even that label does not capture all the dimensions of this tragedy. Since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in August and September of 2005, to the present attempts to mop up oil covering an area greater than the size of Connecticut, some of the rural, food-producing counties of the Louisiana's Gulf Coast have lost half of their former residents. They have felt forced to leave the state in search of better, safer opportunities elsewhere. Due to these disasters, *human lives*—as well their traditional relationships with their plant and animal neighbors—*have changed forever*.

Our concern here is twofold: First and foremost, to avoid the loss of livelihoods for the culturally diverse food producers who live near the Gulf of Mexico, who are already feeling their access to fish, shellfish and waterfowl limited by the spill. Second, to stop the loss of the many wild species and domesticated food varieties upon which the remaining inhabitants of the Gulf Coast nutritionally, economically and ecologically depend.

Among the many long-term consequences from the oil spill will be a pervasive disruption of some of the most unique farming, fishing, hunting and culinary communities left on the planet—not only in the Gulf Coast states of the U.S., but also in Mexico and Cuba as well. These communities deserve what we might call "environmental and food justice," since our government agencies have been both slow and inefficient in protecting their basic human needs.

Many former Gulf Coast residents who farmed or gardened have literally left jars of their family's heirloom vegetable seeds in sheds and cupboards to rot or slowly die, breaking a chain of agricultural transmission of seeds and knowledge that began centuries ago. Some of the remaining gardeners and farmers also happen to be part-time fishermen, oyster harvesters, gator hunters or shrimpers, and they now see other perils looming on their horizon as fishing areas are closed and important spawning grounds are in danger of being choked off by the approaching oil.

Working the land and water, these people—with their minds, eyes, hands and backs—have fed much of America for centuries. The overwhelming majority of shrimp harvested in the U.S. come from the Gulf of Mexico and its adjacent estuaries and rivers. Well over 120 fish species are commercially harvested along the Gulf Coast—from drum, flounder and sheepshead, to countless populations of crawfish, crabs, oysters and clams—each with a distinctive flavor. Over seventy percent of all ducks and geese that migrate through the heartlands of North America depend upon stopover sanctuaries in the coastal wetlands of the Gulf. Many of America's most unique foods—from crawfish jambalaya, Creole cream cheese and Gumbo filé, to Apalachicola oysters, Pineywoods beef and Tabasco peppers—are rooted in Gulf Coast traditions.

One key way that you can help the people and ecosystems of the Gulf Coast recover from yet another catastrophe, is by actively purchasing and promoting their food products during this time of uncertainty. Fishermen will not be selling oil-contaminated or otherwise threatened species. To

the contrary, they desperately need income from the remaining foods that they are able to safely harvest. Poppy Tooker's rallying cry of "Eat It To Save It" for neglected (but not necessarily federally protected) foods, has perhaps never been more fitting. If we want a diversity of healthy foods on our tables, we need to support the food producers who have been tenacious in providing them, or they will turn to other sources of income to make ends meet. Farmers will cull the rare varieties out of their orchards or fields if there is no market for them; fishermen will set sail for the most marketable catch elsewhere if no one values the knowledge and skill they invest in coaxing the most delicious foods from the waters they know best.

The following list of historically-eaten species, varieties and stocks in the Gulf Coast region includes both those already at risk due to habitat loss and other pressures prior to the April 10, 2010 Macandow blow-out, and those "potentially at risk" due to water quality changes and loss of access to habitat since recent disasters.

Of those 241 place-based foods, experts anticipate that access to at least 138 will be directly affected by the oil spill. In other words, more than half of the distinctive foods associated with world-famous Creole and Cajun cuisines are being put at further risk by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, even though many of them had not yet fully recovered from the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Aside from investing your buying power as a consumer in the market recovery of fishing and farming in the Gulf Coast, we encourage you to give what donations you can to some of the organizations listed below. We also urge you to support a new initiative we are proposing to designate New Orleans a UNESCO City of Gastronomy, because its intangible culinary heritage is now in urgent need of safeguarding. So let's vote with our mouths, bellies and pocketbooks for the speedy recovery of the food-producing cultures dependent on the health of the Gulf of Mexico, for their culinary traditions are clearly an irreplaceable component of our World Heritage. The Vermilionaires are in danger of losing their riches.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- **Crescent City Farmers Market (http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org), White Boot Brigade (http://www.whitebootbrigade.org/) and Adopt-a-Mirliton Project (http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org/index.php?page=adopt-a-mirliton)**
- **Cultural Resource Institute of Acadiana (http://www.criala.org)**
- **Southern Foodways Alliance (http://www.southernfoodways.com)**
- **Catch Shares in Gulf of Mexico/Texas Program of Environmental Defense (http://www.edf.org)**
- **Save Our Wetlands (http://www.saveourwetlands.org)**
- **Southern Seed Legacy (http://www.uga.edu/ebl/ssl/)**
- **Pineywoods Cattle Registry and Breeders Association (http://www.pcrba.org)**

Through August 1, 2010, the fish and shellfish brought to market have been rigorously tested and show no signs of oil contamination. From Florida westward through Louisiana and Texas, the conscientious fishermen, wholesalers and retailers who bring safe seafood to us deserve and need our support.

Gary Paul Nabhan is RAFT founder and co-founder of Flavors Without Borders. He has been honored for his work in the collaborative conservation of food diversity with the Vavilov Medal and a MacArthur Genius Award. A prolific author, his books and blogs can be found at http://www.garynabhan.com. He raises hell and orchard crops in Patagonia, Arizona.

Regina Fitzsimmons is a recent graduate from the University of Arizona with a degree in Nonfiction Writing and a minor in Crop Production from the agricultural college. Formerly a Slow Food USA intern, she now works with the RAFT alliance and Sabores Sin Fronteras in Tucson, Arizona. She cooks and gardens and blogs about successes and flops at http://reginarae.com.

Leigh Belanger is the Program Director for Chefs Collaborative where she directs educational initiatives aimed at making sustainability second nature for every chef in the U.S. Leigh is currently heading a RAFT initiative that brings chefs and local growers together to produce and feature heirloom vegetables adapted to their region. She writes about food and restaurants for the Boston Globe, *Edible Boston* and other publications. She is pursuing a Masters Degree in Food Studies from Boston University, and is working on a book, *Boston Homegrown*, about chefs and local foods in the Boston area.

RAFT and its partners neither condone nor endorse consumption of federal or state protected species and highly-depleted stocks. We encourage consumers to support the recovery of these species or stocks so that future generations can enjoy sustainable harvests once recovery is ensured. We also actively support community and/or tribal food sovereignty, and encourage others to do so as well.

What Will We Cook? What Will We Eat?

Sara Roahen

STAR BLACK

GARY NABHAN

Sara Roahen is a writer and oral historian whose work celebrates the deep connections between food, memory and place. Active in the Southern Foodways Alliance, she is author of *Gumbo Tales: Finding My Place at the New Orleans Table.* She is based in New Orleans.

YES, THERE IS PETTINESS and a bit of potential gluttony when we lament the gustatory losses resulting from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Eleven workers didn't survive the explosion; many fishermen have likely lost their livelihoods, as well as the livelihoods they intended to pass on to their progeny. Untold numbers of plants and animals—not just single lives, but possibly entire species—are now in danger and dying. And yet, in a world of relativity, an urban New Orleanian like me can't help but also worry for the boiled crabs, speckled trout amandine, char-grilled oysters and, especially, seafood gumbo. I fear for the recipes, for the dishes and for the unchecked joy that hovers over every inch of the Gulf Coast as its citizens prepare and eat them.

I know more cooks than professional fishermen, so when I'm lying awake putting faces to our losses, I see many of the oral history subjects who have shared their gumbo stories with me and the Southern Foodways Alliance (the organization for which I collect their histories).

I see Frank Brigtsen, a passionate recreational fisherman and the chef-proprietor at Brigtsen's Restaurant in Uptown New Orleans. He grew up in the city eating his mama's Creole gumbo, a dish she cooked-up with a "deep dark brown roux, smoked sausage, shrimp, oysters, crabs and sometimes even chicken." I wonder whether Frank will ever taste his childhood again, or whether his mama's gumbo recipe will be archived on his mind's palate like other faraway meals. Moreover, I wonder what will happen to Charlie's Seafood, the beloved, casual seafood restaurant that Frank resurrected in his own suburban neighborhood last year and where, at least pre-spill, the okra gumbo brimmed with local shrimp and oysters.

I see Celestine "Tina" Dunbar, who is still trying to re-open her restaurant, Dunbar's Creole Kitchen, which flooded badly after the levee breaches of 2005. She serves her own version of Creole gumbo every Friday in the cafeteria for Loyola University's law school, where she's made a living in the meantime. Along with two different sausages and chicken, Celestine's gumbo contains dried and fresh shrimp. Each bowl has a crab exoskeleton center-

BIGSTOCK

piece, its flavor having melded into the broth while it cooked. During Lent, Tina removes the meat, adds oysters and serves a straight seafood gumbo that her Catholic regulars include in their penances. Her father taught her how to make gumbo when she was six years old. "This is a gumbo city," she told me.

I see Jim Gossen, a native of Acadiana (a.k.a. Cajun country), who runs a wholesale seafood business in Houston and makes a hefty seafood gumbo of oysters, crab and shrimp to feed his gigantic family every Christmas Eve. Jim also has a camp—a refuge on stilts—on Grand Isle, Louisiana, where he seems to maintain brotherly associations with all the commercial fishermen, and where I once stood in his kitchen eating what felt like gallons of a cool shrimp ceviche-like dish. He had bought the shrimp straight off the docks that morning. Crude oil began to hit the shores of Grand Isle a few days ago. You can watch it from the living room of Jim's camp.

I see myself last Christmas: My in-laws were here to celebrate, but with a four-month-old baby, a house under construction and a husband working overnights in Baton Rouge, I decided that our usual Christmas feast wouldn't fit the mood. A celebration was nevertheless in order and I figured that if the festivities involved only one course, my husband might actually have time to enjoy it with us.

When there's room for just one festive dish on the table in New Orleans, the choice is clear (and especially so if grandparents are around to entertain the baby while you stir your roux). As Frank Brigtsen put it, a gumbo is a special event, a "social event," a coming-together. A gumbo is style and substance, form and function, sustenance for the body and for the spirit. Into mine went two pounds of shrimp, two pints of shucked oysters and a whole mess of crab. There's never enough crab. Oh, but that's just a figure of speech, of course; down here we've always had plenty of crab…

Louisianans will continue to cook. We will continue to eat. We might even continue to enjoy cooking and eating from the Gulf. Still, the question looms: Will we ever again have enough crab—or oysters, or shrimp—for all of our seafood gumbos? ■


GARY NABHAN

Foods at Risk in the Gulf Coast Foodshed

T = Threatened
For wild species, federally listed as threatened or vulnerable—few (11-20) sites, small range, or rapid declines noted in the NatureServe database; for domesticated food varieties, availability known only through 4-6 farmers' markets, CSAs, seed catalogs, tree nurseries, botanical gardens, community festivals and museums.

E = Endangered
For wild species, federally listed as endangered or critically imperiled—few (1-10) sites, small range, rapid declines in NatureServe database; for domesticated food varieties, availability known only through 1-3 farmers' markets, CSAs, seed catalogs, tree nurseries, botanical gardens, community festivals and museums.

PAR = Potentially at Risk
Potentially at risk from water quality changes and loss of access to habitat due to recent disasters. Note that through August 1, 2010, the tested fish and shellfish brought to market showed no signs of contamination.

*** = on the Ark of Taste, Slow Food USA's catalog of endangered foods**
Like the other foods on this list, Ark of Taste foods are at-risk and place-based. Additionally, they have (1) deep historical and/or cultural roots and a tradition of use in the locale/region, (2) unique/superior flavor, appearance or texture and (3) market potential. Anyone can nominate a food to the Ark of Taste. Nominations are vetted by a committee of Slow Food USA members. Go to http://www.slowfoodusa.org for more information.

NAME • THREATENED (T) ENDANGERED (E) POTENTIALLY AT RISK (PAR)	• GULF STATES
FISH & SHELLFISH	
Fish	
Great barracuda	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Guangache barracuda	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Black sea bass	PAR	AL, FL
Rock sea bass	PAR	LA, TX, MEXICO
Gafftopsail catfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, MEXICO
Hardhead catfish	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, MEXICO
Cobia/Ling cod	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, MEXICO
Cusk-eel/Bearded brotula	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Dolphinfish/Dorado/Mahi mahi	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Pompano dolphinfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Black drum	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Granier/Golden croaker	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Gulf kingfish/King croaker	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Redfish/Red drum	T, PAR	FL, LA, TX
Southern kingfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
American eel/Conger eel	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Broad flounder	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Fluke flounder	PAR	TX
Gulf flounder	PAR	AL, FL, MS, LA, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Southern flounder/Doormat	PAR	AL, FL, MS, LA, MEXICO
Alligator gar/Garfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Black driftfish/Barrel grouper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Black grouper	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Comb grouper	PAR	FL, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Gag grouper	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Goliath grouper	E, PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Marbled grouper/Slopehead	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Misty grouper	PAR	FL, LA, MS, CUBA, MEXICO
Nassau grouper/Cherna criolla	PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Red grouper	PAR	AL, FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Snowy grouper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Warsaw grouper	T, PAR	NC, SC, GA, FL, AL
Yellowedge grouper	PAR	LA, TX, MEXICO
Yellowfin grouper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Yellowmouth grouper/Caborita	PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO

The Happiest Place in New Orleans

Richard McCarthy

SHAWN ESCOFFERY

Richard McCarthy's work embodies the phrase, "think globally; act locally." After growing up in New Orleans and earning his master's degree at the London School of Economics, he co-founded the Crescent City Farmers Market in 1995. As executive director, he led the organization from a single, weekly farmers market to Market Umbrella, an internationally recognized mentor for several markets, community-building and sustainable economic development. He remains based in New Orleans.

When Hurricanes Katrina and Rita slammed into the U.S. Gulf Coast and caused widespread collapse of our infrastructure, we were reminded rather violently of the fragility of our lives, our livelihoods, our ecosystem and our foodshed.

The hurricanes destroyed our homes and so we moved into neighboring communities like exiles. And yet, the disaster also brought us together: In our makeshift homes, we rekindled elements of the Crescent City Farmers Market and in so doing, we pieced-together the community I had worked and grown with over the previous decade. Deputizing a team of farmers, fishers and shoppers, we sent them out into the field to survey what remained of our dispersed community. Their findings informed philanthropic and public policy decisions as well as our own: when, where and with whom to restart our Farmers Market.

Ten weeks after Katrina, we restarted the Market. It was a Tuesday, two days before Thanksgiving in 2005. This event marked more than a return of commerce amidst a sea of chaos. It served as a symbol of defiance against the chorus of voices who began to question our traditions—who even questioned whether red beans and rice should be served again, whether St. Joseph's altars should be constructed, whether mirlitons should be planted on New Orleans back fences and whether fishing families should harvest brown shrimp in coastal waters.

From our outdoor market—our "office of homeland serenity"—we gave refuge and economic stability to farming families. For some, we simply gave a place to market the organic satsumas they harvested in once-flooded lands below the city. For others—like the men with guns who patrolled our broken city—we gave them fresh food that they could get only at our Market. We proclaimed our markets a "FEMA-free zone," but we couldn't turn these men away. Despite our tears and anger, we remembered that markets, like dinner tables, help to define the taste of place.

Soon we began to see the market as a hub for community restoration. Working with a team of communications experts, we launched a multifaceted marketing campaign proclaiming the Market to be "The happiest place in New Orleans." Capturing the voices of farmers, fishers and shoppers speaking for themselves in their own accents, we broadcasted radio advertisements that welcomed people to come home … to the Market.

Five years later, and in the face of a very different type of disaster—BP Deepwater Horizon's industrial spew of oil upon the Gulf Coast—much of our region's food traditions remain intact, if not stronger than before. Maybe our earlier flirt with (cultural) death makes us treasure *gumbo des herbes* more during Lent, Creole tomatoes in June and backyard shrimp boils in the late spring.

But we can't help but notice the fragility of the very same coastal waters that kept the number of commercial fishers low prior to the oil spill. Some fishing families embraced the hurricane-inflicted chaos by joining forces as members of the White Boot Brigade, a traveling shrimpers road show hell-bent on promoting sustainable harvests, cultural preservation and business innovation. Twice, we marched into new markets—in Manhattan and San Francisco—leaning heavily upon the appetite

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for our fishers' unique, sweet water crustaceans. We rekindled support for our fishers with help from important allies in Slow Food, Share Our Strength, Williams-Sonoma and the farmers' market world. Fishers hand-delivered their product to chefs and together, they learned how to adapt these unusually tasting and textured seafood to new palettes. This campaign brought fishers hundreds of miles away—geographically and emotionally—from their devastated homes, boats and communities. As a result, fishing families became boutique shippers and niche market innovators. But others—be it dairies, oyster operations or soft shell crabbers—have yet to find the resources to restart.

In this last half-decade of turmoil, we have lost many dear friends, happily made new ones and through it all, we have marveled at the intense waves of new passion for local foods expressed by nameless home cooks and famous restaurant chefs. As uncertainty continues to wreak havoc upon our fragile food system, we celebrate poke salat, wild ramps and the wild Bell River crawfish. You can find and celebrate them, too, three days per week, year-round, rain or shine at the Crescent City Farmers Market.

The Crescent City Farmers Market will celebrate its fifteenth anniversary in October 2010. It is the flagship project of http://www.marketumbrella.org.

For more details about the restarting of the Crescent City Farmers Market, profiles of innovative fishers and the White Boot Brigade, visit the organization's YouTube channel: http://youtube.com/marketumbrella. ■

NAME • THREATENED (T) ENDANGERED (E) POTENTIALLY AT RISK (PAR) • GULF STATES

Fish continued

Red hind	PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Rock hind	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Speckled hind	T, PAR	AL, FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Pigfish/Orange grunt	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX
White/Key West grunt	PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
African pompano	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Florida pompano	T, PAR	AL, FL, CUBA
Permit/Round pompano	PAR	FL, CUBA
Almaco jack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Bluntnose jack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Greater amberjack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Lesser amberjack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Rainbow runner/Spanish jack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Yellow jack	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Cero mackerel	PAR	AL, FL, CUBA
Spanish mackerel	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blue marlin	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
White marlin	E, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Sailfish/Spindlebeak billfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Mountain mullet	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, MEXICO
Striped mullet/Lisa	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
White mullet	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Jolthead porgy	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS
Knobbed/Key West porgy	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA
Spinycheek scorpionfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Red porgy/Sea bream	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, CUBA, MEXICO
Graysby/Sea bass	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Sand seatrout	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Silver seatrout	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Alabama shad	T, PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS
Atlantic sharpnose shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blacktip shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Bignose shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Bonnethead/Hammerhead shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Bull shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MO, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Dusky shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Great hammerhead shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Large-tooth sawfish/Carpenter shark	T	TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Lemon shark	T, PAR	FL
Longfin mako shark	PAR	FL, CUBA
Sand tiger shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Scalloped hammerhead shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Shortfin mako shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Silky shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Smalltooth sawfish/Carpenter shark	E, PAR	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Spinner shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Spiny dogfish shark	E, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Thresher shark	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Tiger shark	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blackfin snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Creole fish/Rose snapper	PAR	LA, TX, MEXICO
Cubera snapper	T, PAR	FL, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Dog snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, CUBA
Grey/Black/Mangrove snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Hogfish/Hog snapper	PAR	AL, FL, CUBA
Lane snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Mahoghany snapper	PAR	FL, CUBA
Mutton snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Queen snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Red snapper	PAR	AL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Schoolmaster/Barred snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Silk snapper	PAR	AL, FL, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Vermillion snapper	T, PAR	TX, LA, MS, AL, FL

NAME • THREATENED (T) ENDANGERED (E) POTENTIALLY AT RISK (PAR) • GULF STATES		
Fish continued		
Yellowtail snapper	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Spadefish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Alabama sturgeon	E	AL, MS
Atlantic sturgeon	T	AL, LA, MS, FL
Gulf sturgeon	T	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX
Pallid sturgeon	E	MT, ND, SD, MN, IA, IL, MO, AR, MS
Swordfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Anchor tilefish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blackline tilefish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blueline tilefish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Goldfaced tilefish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Grey triggerfish	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Queen triggerfish	PAR	FL, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Albacore tuna	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Atlantic bonito	PAR	AL, FL, MS, LA, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Bigeye tuna	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Escolar/White tuna	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Little tunny	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Skipjack tuna	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Wahoo	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Oilfish	PAR	AL, FL, MS, CUBA, MEXICO
Shellfish		
Black clam	PAR	TX, MEXICO
Helmet clam/Almeja casco	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Rooster clam/Almeja gallo	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Southern quahog/Hard clam	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Atlantic queen conch	E	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
Calico scallop	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Eastern Gulf bay scallop/ Pine Island Sound bay scallop	T	AL, FL
Eastern Gulf bay scallop/ Chandeleur Islands or Delta bay scallop	E	LA
Eastern Gulf bay scallop/ Tampa bay scallop	T	FL
Western Gulf bay scallop/ Laguna Madre bay scallop	T	TX, MEXICO
Blue crab	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, MEXICO
Apalachicola oyster	PAR	FL
Galveston Bay oyster	T, PAR	TX
Louisiana oyster	PAR	LA
Brown shrimp	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Mississippi River freshwater shrimp	T	IL, IN, OH, LA, MO, MS
Pink shrimp	PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
WILD FOODS		
Wild Plants		
American chestnut X chinquapin*	E	AL, GA
Chickasaw plum, selected varieties	T	AL, GA, LA, MS, TN
Fragrant prickly apple cactus	E	FL
Miccosukee gooseberry	E	FL
Okeechobee gourd	E	FL, MEXICO
Okeechobee pond apple	T	FL
Price's potato-bean/Groundnut/ Traveler's delight	T	AL, MS
Purple passionflower/ Maypop selected varieties	T	AL, GA, LA, MS
Scrub plum	E	FL
Wild Fowl		
American coot/Mudhen	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
American woodcock	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX

"GET IT NOW because it won't last long." When it comes to Louisiana seafood, that's the bottom line many seem to assume from the recent Gulf of Mexico oil spill. However, it couldn't be further from the truth.

In the wake of the oil spill, more than seventy percent of Louisiana's waters have remained open to seafood harvesting. Any closures made at this point are solely precautionary. While offshore waters do produce large quantities of seafood, inland lakes produce a fair share as well. As long as the leaking oil is stopped, most of these inland waters will never be affected. What's more, even if traces of oil make it into these areas, there is still hope.

Shrimp, as you may know, are a truly renewable resource. A new crop hatches each year. Harvesting openings revolve around their growth stages to ensure that the crops can survive. At the time of the oil spill, most of the inland waters—including Lake Pontchartrain—were not open to shrimp harvesting because the shrimp were not mature enough. As long as the larvae in the marshes can continue their life cycle, the shrimp stock is solid.

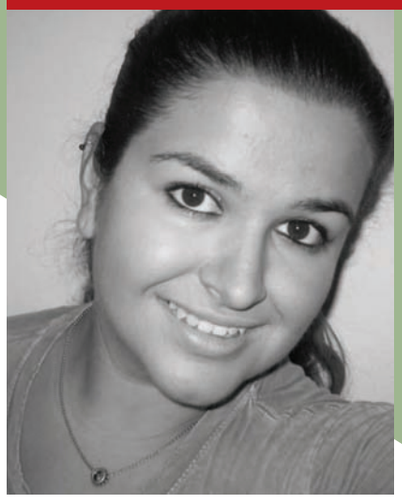
The "gloom and doom" that much of the media has emphasized since the spill is perhaps more dangerous to the seafood industry than the oil spill itself. Society at large needs to know now, more than ever, that Louisiana seafood is safe and available. Sure, some fishermen have chosen to work with the oilrigs and some fear that even temporary closures may put them out of business, but the majority is still working hard to supply the market.

Like with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, those whom are able to harvest will. Their favorite and traditional harvesting locations may not be as accessible, but there is still plenty seafood to be caught and fishermen still need to provide for their families. This is where all of you readers can help.

Christina Gerica

CHRISTINA GERICA

CHRISTINA GERICA



CHRISTINA GERICA

To claim that the oil spill is more devastating than the hurricanes is completely ludicrous. While seafood was readily available in the wake of the 2005 hurricanes, the industry was in shambles. Many of us fishing families lost everything—boats and homes, you name it. Buying docks were destroyed and, in some cases, could not be rebuilt. Even those who were fortunate enough to be spared direct damage from the storms still felt its repercussions. Restaurants closed and tourism became nearly non-existent.

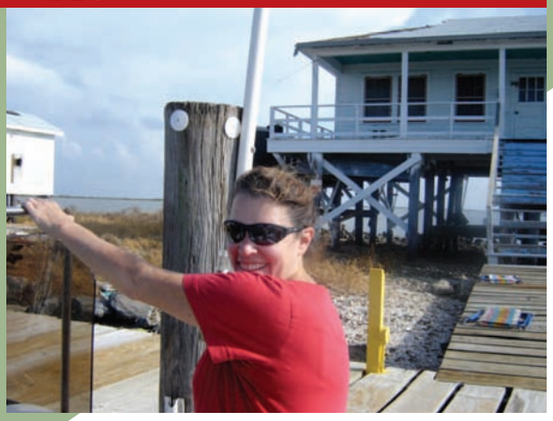
At the end of the day, yes, we all need to keep close eyes on the effects of the oil spill. The spill needs to be contained and cleaned up. *All* of the oil that has already leaked into the Gulf needs to be dealt with properly. But Louisiana seafood is not going anywhere. Commercial fishermen are, for the most part, a very resilient kind—we're used to handling whatever Mother Nature throws our way. The Gulf Coast community of seafood harvesters will weather yet another storm, so long as everyone does their part from harvesting to processing, from marketing to purchasing. ■

Christina Gerica is involved in food marketing and preserving the heritage and livelihood of commercial fishermen, while pursuing a writing career. She has worked with her family's business, Pete and Clara's Seafood, at the Crescent City Farmers Market for the last ten years and her dad's organization, Lake Pontchartrain Fishermen's Association, nearly all of her life. After the hurricane blew her house apart, she and her family found themselves perched in a tree in nearly twelve feet of water for seven hours. Since the storm, she and her family have continued to work with local markets and have fought to restore and preserve the fishing industry.

PABLEAUX JOHNSON

Eat It To Remember It

Poppy Tooker



Poppy Tooker, a chef, food folklorist and storyteller, is founder of Slow Food New Orleans, former chair of Slow Food's Ark of Taste Committee and host of *Louisiana Eats* which broadcasts weekly on the National Public Radio affiliate, WWNO 89.9 FM. In her cooking classes, and as author of the award-winning Crescent City Farmers Market Cookbook, she has introduced tens of thousands of eaters to the uniqueness of Gulf Coast cuisines. Her battle cry "Eat It To Save It" has now been heard around the world.

MY EARLIEST MEMORIES of eating boiled seafood date back to my high chair. My grandfather always sat next to me, perfectly cracking crab claws before placing them on my tray alongside succulent, peeled boiled shrimp.

By the age of seven, I was spending summers on Grand Isle with my best friend, Susan. The Steiner's camp was situated just across Highway One from the beach and their fishing boat was always moored in the harbor. We trout fished in Camanada Bay in the morning and gigged for flounder with lanterns on the beach at night. The shrimp boats bought fuel and ice and sold their catch at the dock on the far end of the island—a five-minute drive from the camp. Huge bins of just-caught shrimp were iced in layers and available for sale for a song.

Twenty-five years ago I began going to the Keegan's camp in Bay Ronquille at Four Bayou Pass with my husband, Nicky. Situated on its own island, complete with cistern and generator, the fishing there never quit.

Originally, in the late 1940s, the house was built to shelter an oysterman and his family, who ran an oyster fishing business from the island. At that time, the house was surrounded by oyster beds. Even in the mid-1980s when I started staying at the camp, at low tide, you could still see the oysters everywhere, spitting as they dined from the fertile waters.

Casting a net from the dock, you could catch live shrimp and bait a double line with two shrimp at a time! In May you could catch speckled trout two at a time with live shrimp bait until you reached your limit or just wore out.

Then the real fun began: We'd fillet the trout and stuff the fish frames into crab traps that we'd throw out into the bay with floats. In a couple of hours we'd have dozens of crabs to boil. We'd sit on the porch of the camp, picking and eating and throwing the "bayou degradable" shells back into the water.

With trout, crab and shrimp at my disposal, I could combine the three for one of the best stuffed-trout dinners imaginable. We'd grill redfish, scales on, skin-side down on the fire in a way we called "on the half shell."

PHOTOS FOR THIS ESSAY ARE BY POPPY TOOKER

Somehow, the camp survived Hurricane Katrina with just some roofing and wall repair. It was the only functioning camp remaining in Four Bayou Pass after Hurricane Rita followed Katrina. The erosion of the marshland was startling. The camp is situated on piers and after the storms, so little of the island remained that water flowed under the camp at high or low tide—but the fishing only got better. We could actually hook fish from the second floor balcony, just outside the kitchen door.

Each spring after the hurricanes ripped up the barrier island, we'd take five-minute boat rides over to the rookery where brown pelicans, snowy egrets and pinkish roseate spoon bills laid their eggs and hatched their young. On "Bird Island," as we called it, the birds nested close together at the water's edge, almost like Manhattan Island for waterfowl.

But the oil rupture in April 2010 brought death—first to the eleven men who didn't survive the rig explosion. The oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico, dumping untold barrels of "sweet Louisiana crude," that killed all marine life in its path. As it moved inland to the marshland, the marsh itself died. On "Bird Island," the unhatched eggs were coated with oil. Mother pelicans swam exhaustively trying to clean the oil from their feathers until they were too tired and weak to get back to their nests. Raccoons, nutria and many other critters became oil-coated and expired. Coastal erosion will inevitably accelerate when the dead marsh grasses wash away, and carry with it bits of land from which the grass was once attached.

When I was a little girl, my great-grandmother would ask me to finish my meal by saying "Poppy, eat it to save it." For the last decade, that request has resonated as a battle cry in my food preservation and recovery work. But since the disaster, every time I've been able to purchase and eat fresh, Gulf seafood I've wondered, is this "Eat It To Remember It?" ■

NAME • THREATENED (T) ENDANGERED (E) POTENTIALLY AT RISK (PAR) • GULF STATES		
Wild Fowl continued		
Black-crowned night heron/Quawk	T, PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Blue-winged teal	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Black rail	T, PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX
Mangrove clapper rail	PAR	FL
Sora rail	T, PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX
Virginia rail	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX
Common snipe	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX
Greater scaup	PAR	AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Northern bobwhite quail	T	TX
Wild Game		
Louisiana black bear	T	LA, MS, TX
Key Vaca raccoon	T, PAR	FL
Key West raccoon	T, PAR	FL
Wild Reptiles		
American alligator	E	FL, CUBA, MEXICO
American crocodile	E	FL, NC, SC, AL, MS, GA, TX, OK
(Atlantic) Green sea turtle	T	NY, NJ, DE, MD, AL, FL, GA, MS, LA, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Diamond-backed terrapin	T, PAR	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX
Hawksbill sea turtle	E	AL, FL, MS, LA, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Kemp's Ridley sea turtle	E	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Leatherback sea turtle	E	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
Loggerhead sea turtle	T	AL, FL, LA, MS, TX, CUBA, MEXICO
DOMESTICATED ANIMALS		
Heritage Livestock Breeds		
Florida cracker cattle*	E	FL
Pineywoods cattle*	E	AL, GA, MS
Guinea pig	E	FL, GA, MS
Red wattle hog*	E	TX, LA
Gulf Coast sheep	E	FL, GA, LA, TX
St. Croix sheep	T	VI, WA, OR, CA
Heritage Poultry Breeds		
Cubalaya chicken	T	FL, CUBA
Cotton patch goose*	E	AR, MS, LA
Royal palm turkey	T	FL
DOMESTICATED FOOD CROPS		
Heritage Fruit & Nuts		
Cauley apple	E	MS, LA
Centennial pecan	E	LA, MS
Hawkworth apple	E	AL
Shell apple	E	AL, FL
Texas star banana	E	TX
Duncan grapefruit	E	FL, CA
Hamlin orange	E	FL
Key lime/West Indies lime	T	FL
Marsh seedless grapefruit	T	FL
Ponderosa lemon	T	FL
Abbeville jujube	E	LA
Fitzgerald jujube	E	GA
Sherwood jujube	T	LA, MS
Louisiana pecher peach	X	LA
Louisiana white peach	X	LA
Golden boy pear	E	FL
Flatwoods plum	E	NC, SC, FL, GA, MS, LA
North Carolina seedling pomegranate	E	NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, LA
Berries		
Gulfcoast highbush blueberry	E	FL, GA
Liberty grape	E	FL
T.O. Warren's opaca hawthorne	E	FL

Oysters a la Apalachicola

Janisse Ray

RAVEN WATERS

BIGSTOCK

PABLEAUX JOHNSON

Janisse Ray is a poet, essayist and conservation activist who grew up around Baxley, Georgia, not far from the Gulf Coast. Her first book, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, won an American Book Award and she has authored two other books of literary nonfiction. She spends much of her time defending and restoring the longleaf pine ecosystem to its rightful place in America. She is co-editor of *UnspOILed: Writers Speak for Florida's Coast*, out this summer, from the Red Hills Writers Project.

I CANNOT STOP THINKING ABOUT THE OYSTERS.

My first taste of them came when I was twenty, fresh away from the insularity and isolation of rural, southern Georgia. I left to study in the Panhandle of Florida. At the time, I had no idea what a "raw bar" was or what "on the half-shell" meant.

Soon after my move, I found myself in one of these raw joints, with friends who were ordering these creatures with a swashbuckling zealotry. *Did I like oysters*? they asked. I admitted that I did not know if I did or didn't.

The first taste had marshes in it. It had the sun, coquina, fiddler crabs. I remember the very moment: the precursory tang of lemon, the memory-rich familiarity of horseradish sauce and finally, the earthy, fleshy, volcanic madcap of wild oyster itself, followed by a salty and gritty aftertaste of sea.

The Gulf of Mexico was the territory in which I came of age. There, I first saw plovers nesting on beach-sand. I saw a freshwater spring bubbling from the salty depths of the Gulf. I experienced wildfire. I made my first bird list and added Oystercatcher to it. I retrieved my first scallop.

I had colossal good fortune that I arrived in Florida and became the woman that I am, underneath the Panhandle sun, in its shallow, estuarine refuges, in its voluptuous bounty. How glad I am that the first raw oyster I tasted was a wild one from Apalachicola.

Apalachicola Bay is legendary. It is the recipient of river waters that begin in the Georgia mountains, where erosions have deposited ivory-white sand along the famous beaches of the Gulf, hauling seaward the detritus and nutrients necessary for richness.

The land is not called the Panhandle for naught. Whatever the handle, the Bay is the pan—an iron skillet—and in it we are searing scallops, flounder, grouper, shrimp, shark, blue crab and oyster. For millennia the smoky pan has overflowed—this estuary was one of the most productive in the northern hemisphere.

Apalachicola Bay is the mother lode of oysters. For thousands of years the bivalve has sated people along the Gulf of Mexico. The staggering evidence of that yield can be found in swales of head-high Native middens constructed solely of bone-white shells. We buy them by the burlap bag and roast them, standing around autumn fires, oyster knives in hand.

Although only five percent of the bay bottom is embedded with the architecture of the bivalve, four to six million pounds of meat are harvested there each year, a tenth of all oysters consumed in the U.S. Sixty to eight-five percent of the residents of Franklin County, Florida make their living from the seafood industry.

To survive, oysters need fresh water. Drought and dams (brought to national attention by the Water Wars of Florida, Georgia and Alabama) have starved the system of fresh water and the nutrients it carries. Hurricanes have taken their toll, through siltation and contamination.

What will happen to the oysters in the aftermath of British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon oil spill, in the toxicity of the oils and record amounts of dispersants? While oysters are filter feeders, designed to handle pollution, they certainly cannot defend against pollution of this magnitude.

In late May, scientists discovered a second plume of invisible hydrocarbons in the Gulf, twenty-two miles long and six miles wide, made of oil particles broken apart by dispersants. It was moving inland.

How will oysters, which have provided so many feasts for so many centuries, survive? ■

Reclaiming Louisiana's Coastal Treasures

LOUIS MICHOT

Louis Michot

LUCIOUS FONTENOT

Louis Michot is the celebrated fiddler and lead singer of the Grammy-nominated Lost Bayou Ramblers, a roots Cajun band with a kick. He is also deeply involved in rescuing the seeds and folklore of Cajun culture through the Cultural Research Institute of Acadiana (CRIA). Louis lives in Prairie des Femmes with his wife Ashlee and son Julien, and can often be heard on the air at KRVS Radio Acadie in Lafayette, LA.

LOUIS MICHOT

THE RURAL POPULATIONS of Louisiana's Gulf Coast are some of the most diverse and unique in the country, yet their self-reliant lifestyle is more endangered than ever before. Our mission at the Cultural Research Institute of Acadiana (CRIA) is to save the seeds and knowledge of our many cultures. This pursuit has been made ever more urgent by the displacement of many community members after the hurricanes of 2005, which forced families to leave behind generations of food traditions and seeds. While the Gulf Coast once offered a bountiful harvest of shrimp, oysters, fish and game, now communities of Cajuns, Native Americans and many other persistent peoples have been forced to search further inland for a stable home and livelihood.

To offer an example, the Pointe-aux-Chiens Indians of the larger Houma tribe play a critical role in preserving the Cajun French language by speaking and sharing it with younger generations. Some of the elder tribal members solely speak this lyrical tongue and in so doing, keep alive the names of many species in the flora and fauna of coastal Louisiana that were inherited from historic native languages.

Just as Cajun French has become an endangered language, traditional seeds of food plants of the Gulf Coast face a similar fate. This region carries an abundance of seed varieties that have been passed down for hundreds of years within the Gulf Coast community. Many of these seedstocks are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain by means other than direct exchange with a local community such as the Casse-Banane de Bresil or the Zydeco Barré-Violet. While CRIA has succeeded in obtaining quantities of some of these varieties to preserve in our Acadiana Seed Bank, many more have yet to be collected. While we are continuing efforts to seek out the keepers of these imperiled food resources, the crude oil leaking into the Gulf of Mexico is likely to make this time-sensitive task even more difficult. The oil spill directly affects these communities by severely impacting their ability to continue to farm or garden on coastal lands and make a living off of the once sustainable, but now endangered, seafood industry.

Some small-scale, coastal farmers survived the hurricane flooding, but they returned home to find a damaged harvest of produce, waterlogged seeds and "salinized" soils that would make future grow-outs even tougher. After suffering so much loss from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, their perseverance is a testament to their ability to recover from disasters. But now these resilient farmers are up against a new catastrophe—one that is not only man-made, but also of a scale never before experienced in our fragile, wetland ecosystem.

Preserving Gulf Coast food traditions is now of unparalleled importance. The agricultural and fishing practices and accompanying recipes of these communities are the glue that bonds Louisiana's indigenous cultures to its land and waters. Fishing and farming have been the lifelines for generations in Acadiana. Our communities have always been rich in spirit and rich in song—so much so that both are celebrated and honored locally and internationally. These communities harbor homegrown experts on sustainable land use who are transmitters of local knowledge and traditions that have amassed over hundreds and thousands of years—traditions now in danger of being lost in a matter of decades. Volumes of undocumented knowledge are now in danger of slipping through our hands—from fishing and hunting craft, to medicinal uses of local plants, to farming techniques.

The current situation is such that no one knows if or for how long the remaining members of these communities will be able to survive before they, too, are forced to relocate to inland regions and make do with what arable land is still available. The urgency that accompanies the environmental cleanup from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill needs to go beyond the endangered plants and animals; if the Gulf Coast is to come out of this disaster with the seeds and knowledge to continue our cultural and sustainable legacy, we need to immediately protect our role as cultural stewards. ■

Beyond the Beaches: Oil, Mirlitons and Community Bonds

Lance Hill

JENNIFER ZDON, TIMES-PICAYUNE

Lance Hill, Ph.D. is a historian and Executive Director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University, where he has been engaged in social and interracial justice work for decades. He is also a crop conservationist, a food folklorist and volunteer director of the Adopt-a-Mirliton Project (http://www.crescentcityfarmersmarket.org/index.php?page=adopt-a-mirliton), which is co-sponsored with Market Umbrella.

MISS VIVIAN SELLS MIRLITONS on the honor system at a vegetable stand on Highway 308 in Cut Off, Louisiana. The Horizon oil spill may soon render that practice a faded memory. But I am getting ahead of myself. First, what in the world is a mirliton?

Known as "chayote" in most of the western hemisphere and *Sechium edule* to botanists, the pear-shaped, green squash is a staple in Louisiana cuisine. It has the unique distinction of being the only perennial vegetable grown in the United States. The prolific squash with its French name probably made its way to Louisiana from Haiti after the 1804 Slave Revolt that resulted in the migration of approximately five thousand free people of color to Louisiana. Mirliton has many pronunciations, but the French-inflected pronunciation tends to be "mel-lee-tawn."

Over the decades, growers developed Louisiana varieties that were resistant to disease and native pests. There was a time when every fisherman on the bayou had a mirliton vine that grew over sheds and bushes and high into treetops. The alluvial soil of the bayous and the sub-tropical climate of South Louisiana provided a perfect home for mirlitons. Shrimp and mirlitons seemed destined for an eternal union in Louisiana cuisine, with classic dishes like stuffed mirlitons, shrimp stew and mirliton casserole.

The mirliton became a backyard staple in New Orleans. Not long ago there was someone on nearly every block who had a mirliton vine on the back fence. For a culture that prizes revelry, *the mirliton is the perfect vegetable*: it needs no weeding, no pruning and if you sit under the vine long enough, a mirliton will eventually drop out of the tree into your lap.

The mirliton proves the theory that abundance is the midwife of altruism and generosity. While a person might have to guard their solitary watermelon from night forays by neighbors, a single mirliton vine can produce hundreds of fruit—all in a period of a few weeks. Soon comes the knock on the door and there stands a neighbor with whom you have never exchanged a word. They offer you a big bag of mirlitons. Mirlitons make friends out of strangers.

But something was lost in mirliton growing in recent years. Imported mirlitons became available in stores year-round and soon the backyard mirliton began to fall by the wayside. Occasionally someone would attempt to plant an imported mirliton, but they soon discovered that these hybrids were not adapted to our climate.

Then Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit. Mirlitons don't like wind and water—salt water in particular. Forty-eight hours under salt water and the vine is dead. Overnight, the few locally grown mirlitons seemed to disappear. To remedy this problem, the Adopt-A-Mirliton project that I work with traveled throughout Louisiana to discover traditional varieties. We found several, mainly in the rural countryside. These seed-mirlitons were distributed by the hundreds to growers committed to sharing their crop and reviving the tradition of backyard mirliton growing. People were going to get to know their neighbors again.

But a new catastrophe has arrived at our doorstep: the Gulf Coast oil spill. In the great scheme of things, the mirliton is a minor victim of this manmade disaster. There has been loss of human life, damage to aquatic species, depletion of the wetlands and damage to the seafood-related businesses. But the impact on the mirliton demonstrates the complex relationships between technology, food, culture and community: The dearth of

LANCE HILL

LANCE HILL

shrimp will help put the mirliton out of business. The loss of coastal land will reduce the available land for commercial growers. The decline of the bayou life, where fishing and mirliton-growing went hand-in-hand, will diminish as well. Neighbors will become strangers again.

•••

I found the mirliton farm of Vivian Danos Arceneaux in Cut Off, Louisiana, about thirty miles south of New Orleans. Miss Vivian is the eighty-two-year-old matriarch of a Cajun family that annually grows thousands of mirlitons. She generously donated fifty of her seed mirlitons to our project. We give the varieties names and her family agreed to name one variety "Papa Sylvest," in honor of Miss Vivian's father who started the vines sixty years ago.

Miss Vivian told me that when the crop comes in every fall, she places the mirlitons in baskets by the side of the road in a little vegetable stand with a sign that reads "Mirlitons $3 a dozen." No one works at the stand; instead, she leaves an "honor box" where the customers can put their payment. Sometimes the customers have the money, sometimes they don't. They take the mirlitons just the same and sometimes, in the middle of winter, Miss Vivian will find a few dollar bills left by someone making good on their word. There are no strangers on Highway 308 in Cut Off, Louisiana.

One day I was visiting with the men of her family and a few of their neighbors. I asked if anyone had ever taken money from the box. That got a big laugh. "Man, no way that gonna happen," said one of her neighbors with a twinkle in his eye. "They might steal from the church box, but they won't steal mirliton money."

Amen. Perhaps someday we will learn to treat the earth with the same trust and honor—taking from it only in proportion to what we give back. We have a lot to learn from mirlitons. ■

NAME • THREATENED (T) ENDANGERED (E) POTENTIALLY AT RISK (PAR) • GULF STATES		
Berries continued		
Western mayhaw hawthorne	E	TX
Daybreak strawberry*	E	LA
Headliner strawberry*	E	LA
Klondike strawberry*	E	LA
Tangi strawberry*	E	LA
Grains		
Hasting's prolific corn	X	MS, LA
Honey drip sorghum	E	TX, LA, GA, SC
Orange top sorghum	E	IA
Texas long sweet sorghum	E	TX, LA
Vegetable Crops		
BEAN		
Big frosty bean	E	MS
CHAYOTE		
Traditional Louisiana mirliton	E	LA, MS
CHICORY		
Magdeburg (Louisiana) coffee	T	LA
COLLARD		
Florida collard	X	FL
Georgia blue stem collard	E	GA
Georgia green collard	E	GA
Georgia long standing collard	X	GA, LA, MS
COWPEA		
Blue goose cowpea/Gray crowder	E	GA
Brown crowder	E	MS
Calico crowder	E	VA
Clay/Wonderful cowpea	E	GA, VA
Mississippi brown crowder	T	MS
Pigott family heirloom cowpea	T	LA
Purple hull pink eye cowpea*	E	GA, NC, SC
Rouge et noir crowder*	E	LA
Running conch cowpea*	E	AL
Suzanne cream cowpea	T	GA
Whippoorwill	T	GA, AR, LA, MS
MUSTARD		
Louisiana green velvet	T	LA, MS
OKRA		
Benoist blunt	T	MS
Louisiana red	T	LA, MS
ONION		
Louisiana shallot	T	LA, MS
PEANUT		
Pre-Civil War	T	LA, MS
PEPPER		
Datil pepper	T	FL, CUBA
Louisiana Arledge hot pepper	T	LA
Rooster spur pepper	T	LA
Short yellow tabasco	E	LA
Tabasco?	T	LA
PUMPKIN/SQUASH		
Choctaw sweet potato squash*	E	AL, GA, TN
Creole butternut squash	E	LA
Georgia roaster squash	E	GA
Paydon heirloom acorn squash	E	LA, IL
Seminole pumpkin	E	FL
(Tennessee) Sweet potato cushaw*	E	TN, LA, AR, MS
SWEET POTATO AND YAM		
Southern delight sweet potato	E	LA, MS, ON
Southern queen yam/ White triumph sweet potato	T	TN, MS, LA

BIGSTOCK

SATELLITE IMAGE ON MAP PROVIDED BY NASA EARTH OBSERVATORY

MAP PROVIDED BY DREAMSTIME

Renewing America's Food Traditions is an alliance of food, farming, conservation and culinary advocates who have joined together to ensure that the diverse foods and traditions unique to North America reach our tables by means that make our families and communities healthier and our food system more diverse: ecologically, culturally and structurally. We focus on clusters of foods at risk that we feel we have a capacity to recover, using models of discovery, recovery and sustainability that may inspire others to do similar work. Go to http://www.raftalliance.org for more information about the alliance's current initiatives.

Founding RAFT partners: American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, Chefs Collaborative, Cultural Conservancy, Native Seeds/SEARCH, Seed Savers Exchange and Slow Food USA. RAFT Founder/Facilitator: Dr. Gary Paul Nabhan.

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http://www.raftalliance.org

http://www.garynabhan.com

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Front Cover: Shrimp Gumbo, BIGSTOCK