

*Buddy Guindon,
Board Member, Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance*

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For three decades, Keith “Buddy” Guindon owner of Katie’s Seafood in Galveston, Texas has worked as both a fishermen and a fish house owner-operator. Buddy serves on the board of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders Alliance and has experience working on both the state and federal levels to assist in the implementation of IFQ’s- a type of catch share system- in the red snapper fishery. He educates the entire industry on how and why sustainable fishing practices can best secure the future of Gulf fisheries.

In the decade before the catch share system, the red snapper fishery was facing collapse. Each year, fishing seasons were getting shorter, fish prices were dropping and the stock of red snapper was very rapidly depleting. By 2007, a group of fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico were ready for a change.

Enter the prospect of graduating to catch shares.

Anxious skeptics rose up everywhere, and Buddy was foremost among them. He’d fished his whole life under conventional management. He was deeply hesitant to make the switch.

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The red snapper catch share program has enabled Buddy and Gulf fishermen to fish year-round with stabilized prices and reduced discards, or wasted fish. His business is doing better as the fish stock grows and the catch share also allows him to reduce expenses. With more time to fish, his boats can take longer and more fuel-efficient trips while increasing fishing revenues when dockside prices are high. More time to fish and a flexible schedule also allows Buddy more time spent with family. That wasn’t the case before.

“My life was a disaster,” said Buddy, referring to when he had to fish under conventional management. “I didn’t go to my kids’ baseball games; I didn’t go to church. I didn’t do all the things that normal people do.”

But under catch shares, Buddy could choose when to fish and when to see his family. He has time to repair his boat; his crew can sit out storms and save fishing trips for sunny skies. That’s a relief from when they were forced to fish round the clock, derby-style. One night, after a long and arduous day of work, the lookout crew on duty fell asleep, leaving the boat to drive unattended for several hours through the Gulf’s now notorious oil field. Buddy and his crew got lucky, the boat didn’t wreck, but he’s still shaken by a potentially deadly disaster that they felt compelled to risk.

Beyond improving safety, catch shares let Buddy innovate his fishing career. Rather than compete for a shrinking supply base, he could compete for expanding demand. Markets and restaurants want to know where their food comes from. So Buddy’s organization, The Gulf of Mexico Reed Fish Shareholder’s Alliance, established Gulf Wild. That traceability program gives seafood consumers the ways and means to track their fish to the very boats and the fishermen who haul them in--eliminating seafood fraud and boosting trust.

“You should know where your seafood is caught,” said Buddy. “And you should know some basic things about me, too.”