Harvard, as noted, buys lots of fish. In the winter, when local produce becomes scarcer, it is a good way to continue to “buy local” and show students what it means to eat in New England, Martin said. But fish, and fish stocks are unpredictable—and when feeding thousands of consumers at every meal, unpredictability, both in price and quantity, poses challenges.

Jared Auerbach, founder and CEO of Red’s Best, a wholesaler for small, independent fishermen, struggled too with what he called “a misalignment of supply and demand.” For years before he started selling to Harvard, he discussed with HUDS what a modern local fishery looked like. What are the challenges, and how could large-scale, influential buyers like Harvard direct their purchases to have a positive effect on the system? “We have this beautiful, amazing fishery right now where we’re interacting with Mother Nature in this beautiful appropriate way,” Auerbach said. “But that leads to what you’d expect from Mother Nature, which is unpredictable and everchanging and unknown.” Buyers, accustomed to just a few types of fish, may want haddock on a day when a fisherman catches hake. The disparity can lead to purchasers looking thousands of miles away for overharvested fish, which are environmentally unfriendly to catch and to ship.

The solution: variable fish, but at a fixed volume and price point. What Harvard gets depends on the weekly catch—hake, haddock, skate, dogfish, or monkfish. “And when we buy those underutilized species, it means the fisherman gets a living wage for his fishing