



Media Contact:
Angie Helton
(207) 653-0365
angie@nemediassociates.com

SEA MAINE UNVEILS ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF MAINE'S SEAFOOD ECONOMY

A Maine Seafood Promotional Council for the industry will be Developed as a result of SEA Maine's work

ROCKPORT, Maine (March 1, 2024)— SEA Maine (Seafood Economic Accelerator for Maine), an industry-led effort funded by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) with support from Maine Technology Institute (MTI) and FocusMaine, today released its strategic economic development Roadmap for Maine's marine living resource economy (MLR).

Maine's marine living resource economy includes fishing, lobstering, aquaculture, life sciences, and value-added processing as well as critical supply chain elements, like shipping and logistics, that support industry. The goals of the Roadmap are to grow the overall value of Maine's MLR economy by 10 percent by 2030; grow employment within the MLR sector and related value chain by 1,000 employees by 2030; increase sector-wide financial investments to support infrastructure, available capital, market expansion, and research and development; maintain and expand Maine's working waterfront access and the capacity of working waterfront communities to support infrastructure and businesses; and enhance the ability of the sector to respond to challenges and opportunities resulting from climate change and demographic shifts.

Development of the Roadmap involved collaboration with and support from a number of key partners and industry leaders from around the state, including the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association, Maine Aquaculture Association, Maine Department of Marine Resources, Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Lobstermen's Association, the University of Maine, and others. In addition, more than 30 businesses all across the state, from Aroostook County and Downeast to the midcoast and southern Maine, participated in interviews from which SEA Maine developed a series of workforce attraction videos that will be used to promote the career opportunities in Maine's marine economy.

"Maine's future depends on continued growth of the marine living resource sector," said Curt Brown of Ready Seafood, co-chair of the SEA Maine Steering Committee. "The Roadmap is built around our vision of what Maine could be if the people and businesses in the MLR sector had opportunities to diversify and grow our marine economy in Maine, the U.S., and globally, creating new market opportunities."

Attracting people to work in the MLR sector and diversifying the workforce are key elements of a robust, resilient coastal economy. The Roadmap outlines goals for workforce development that include improving employer access to trained workers, making training accessible to potential employees from all backgrounds, developing sector-specific skill-building and credentialed education programs through the state's educational institutions, developing recruitment campaigns to highlight the range of career opportunities in the sector, and recruiting diverse talent from across Maine and beyond. As part of this effort SEA Maine produced seven workforce attraction videos on a variety of subjects including: innovation, science, logistics and transportation. [Please visit SEA Maine website \(SEA Maine.org\).](http://SEA Maine.org)

Libby Davis, CEO and Founder of Lady Shuckers in Portland, is one of the young entrepreneurs who exemplifies the opportunities within the sector. Davis operates a mobile raw bar and event catering company sourcing world-class Maine oysters directly from its own farm and a network of women-owned farms for a wide variety of catering and educational events. In addition to running a successful business, Lady Shucker's mission is to create more visibility for underrepresented groups on the water.

“I’m a native Mainer and got into this industry in 2018 after returning from three years serving in the Peace Corps,” said Davis. “On the water, I met people who were doers and cared about the environment and about the impact our food systems and climate change had on our oceans. I started out with a rolling ice cart with oysters, popping up once a week at breweries, and now we have the food trailer, eight part-time shuckers who rotate at different events, and we started our own oyster farm this year! The company is still young and I think the future of aquaculture is bright.”

The Gulf of Maine, nourished by cold ocean waters and characterized by a complex geomorphology made up of deep basins and shallow banks, is one of the most biologically productive marine ecosystems on earth. The state’s long coastline, with its many peninsulas and remote coastal communities, makes Maine unique but also creates infrastructure challenges. Creating a robust infrastructure that can support existing and emerging opportunities and a changing climate is all part of the work required for a robust marine living resource economy, as outlined in the Roadmap.

While Maine is best known for lobster, there are a wide range of products harvested in the Gulf of Maine. Naturally occurring species are being altered rapidly with climate change; the catch today will not be what it looks like in 20 years. Fish, shellfish, and seaweed species, both farmed and wild-caught, are harvested from the Gulf of Maine not only for food, but increasingly for non-food products including biostimulants, natural fertilizers, and health, beauty, nutritional, and medicinal products. Land-based aquaculture is also becoming more prevalent within the state as a viable means to produce protein for the world in the coming decades.

American Unagi, founded by SEA Maine Steering Committee co-chair Sara Rademaker, raises wild-caught eels in a state-of-the-art RAS (recirculating aquaculture system) in Waldoboro. Eels cannot spawn in captivity, and Maine has one of the only wild-caught eel fisheries in the country (along with South Carolina). The baby eels, or elvers, are harvested in the early spring,

commanding upwards of \$2,000/pound, and were traditionally sold to farms overseas, where they were grown out and then sold back to American restaurants. American Unagi is keeping the value-added grow-out here in Maine, and in addition to selling live, mature eels to high end establishments, also has their own line of smoked products on the market.

“Globally, eel production has had a reputation of uncertainty, so bringing to market an accountable eel with responsible sourcing and farming practices has been a big part of our mission the last eight years,” Rademaker said. The new facility in Waldoboro began production in early 2023 and plans to produce over 500,000 pounds of eels annually.

SEA Maine commissioned a series of reports based on the work of its committees and industry stakeholders. The data collected, along with input provided from industry stakeholders and information from a number of external reports such as *Maine’s Economic Development Strategy 2020 – 2029*, *Maine Won’t Wait*, and the *Maine Aquaculture Roadmap*, formed the basis of this Roadmap. The full version of the Roadmap, along with SEA Maine’s reports and affiliated projects, can be found on the [SEA Maine website \(seamaine.org\)](https://seamaine.org).

“SEA Maine’s Roadmap outlines a path forward to help foster economic growth for Maine through the expansion of our marine living resource economy,” said Senator Collins. “As Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I will continue to work to ensure that federal resources align with these strategic goals, helping to propel Maine’s maritime sector toward a more resilient and prosperous future.”

“For generations, Maine’s ocean innovators have pioneered new, sustainable fishing and marine practices along our shores,” said Senator King. “Based on the successful FOR/ME initiative that revitalized our forest products industry, the Seafood Economic Accelerator for Maine will build on our long legacy of success and sustainability in commercial fishing, aquaculture, and other maritime opportunities through strategic efforts to expand employment, market development, infrastructure, and businesses. I am grateful for all efforts to promote and modernize Maine’s invaluable seafood

economy; these thoughtful approaches will strengthen our Maine state economy and support our coastal communities.”

“The increasingly frequent and intense storms we’ve endured over the past few months have made one thing abundantly clear: Climate change is here, and its impacts are devastating and costly. Nowhere is this more evident than in our coastal communities. With more than 30,000 Mainers relying on marine-related industries for their livelihoods, it’s more important than ever to continue building a resilient, diversified seafood sector in Maine,” said Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine). “As I continue to fight for climate resilience in Congress by championing legislation to support working waterfronts and coastal fisheries—I’m grateful for the work SEA Maine and the Mills Administration are doing to support and grow our vital Marine Living Resource sector through supporting economic growth, workforce development, and adaptation to a changing climate. The future of Maine depends on it.”

“For hundreds of years, Mainers have been successfully making a living as responsible stewards of our marine resources,” said Congressman Jared Golden (ME-02). “I’m glad to see conversations happening about how to continue this proud legacy, and I maintain my own commitment to giving the industry the voice it deserves in Congress.”

"Maine is continuing to lead through innovation in our heritage industries, including the marine economy," said Heather Johnson, Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development. "SEA Maine's work on this roadmap will help guide workforce development efforts and diversification of the marine economy to foster growth and sustainability."

A select number of projects emerging from SEA Maine’s work - such as the creation of a Maine Seafood Promotional Council funded by the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development – are in the process of being created. This new Council will enhance the Maine seafood brand and bring Maine’s top-quality seafood to new

markets, strengthening Maine's overall food economy. SEA Maine intends to implement additional projects outlined in the Roadmap in the coming years.

[About SEA Maine](#)

SEA Maine, or the Seafood Economic Accelerator for Maine, is an industry-led initiative bringing together leaders in Maine's commercial fishing, aquaculture, seafood and marine economy. Funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, with match funding from the Maine Technology Institute and FocusMaine, the statewide initiative is developing a Roadmap and action plan for economic growth, market and workforce development, and greater resiliency in Maine's seafood economy.

The seafood that comes from Maine's coastal waters and the Gulf of Maine, and the working waterfront communities along our coast, support thousands of good paying jobs and already contribute to the state's \$8 billion tourism industry.