

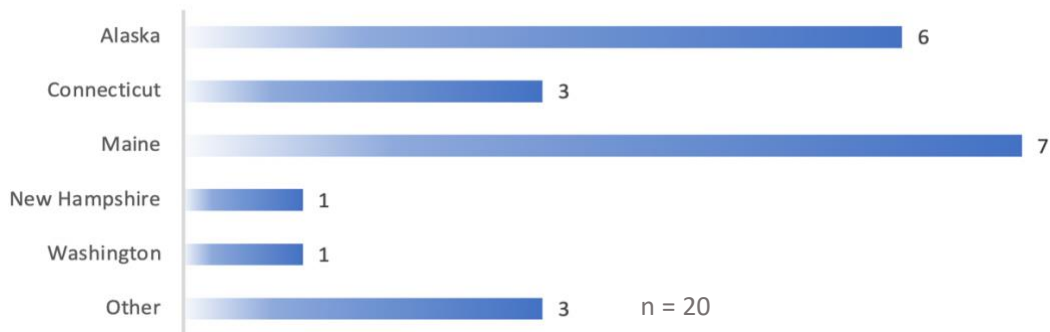
Seaweed Hub Market Development Work Group Virtual Meeting Notes 10/29/20. 3-4PM EST, Zoom

Agenda:

- I. Welcome and Orientation (5 min)
- II. Seaweed Hub Overview (10 min)
- III. Work Group Activities Overview (15 min)
- IV. Breakout Group Discussion: Developing a common vision of Market Development (20 min)
- V. Wrap-up and Next Steps (10 min)

I. Welcome and Orientation

- This is the first virtual meeting of the Market Opportunities Work Group
- The purpose of this meeting is to:
 - Convene and introduce interested work group participants
 - Review the initial work group discussions from the Seaweed Hub Symposium in March 2020
 - Establish a framework for future work group collaboration
- The meeting had 28 participants from the East and West coast, representing seaweed farms and businesses, supporting organizations, universities, and state and federal agencies
- Intro Poll: Where's everyone Zooming in from?



II. Seaweed Hub Overview

Slides from the presentation are also available on the seaweed hub site

What is the Seaweed Hub?

- A science based, non-advocacy resource for the domestic seaweed aquaculture industry
- A collaborative framework to share information, identify needs, address challenges, and find opportunities in the emerging seaweed industry
- 3 year project funded in 2019 by the National Sea Grant Program's Strategic Aquaculture Initiative

Who is involved in the Seaweed Hub?

- Sea Grant Extension from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California
- Our steering committee with representatives from the National Sea Grant Office, NOAA Fisheries, FDA, USDA, and state universities
- Diverse stakeholders: seaweed farmers, processors, businesses, researchers, regulators, culinary professionals, etc.

What are the activities that the Seaweed Hub has planned for the 3 years?

1. Survey (January-March 2020): Formal needs assessment of challenges and opportunities in the seaweed sector
2. Symposium (March 2020): Convening that brought together stakeholders to discuss the status of seaweed aquaculture in the US and kick-off collaborative work groups
3. Work Groups (March 2020-project end): 4 topical work groups (Market Opportunities, Regulations, Post-Harvest Opportunities, and Production Systems) that will continue to meet virtually and have access to applied project funds

III. Work Group Activities

What are the next steps for the work groups?

- Virtual meetings to connect and collaborate. Work groups are opt-in and meant to be responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities
- Develop a work plan in which groups outline priorities and actionable steps
- Access applied project funds to begin to meet work group goals

What are applied project funds?

- Non-competitive flexible funds that will assist work groups in implementing their work plans and meeting the goals and priorities of the Seaweed Hub
- 10,000 available to each work group
- Intended for small scale/pilot projects that can be completed in a two-year timeframe

How do work groups access applied project funds?

- Work groups collaborative develop a project idea or ideas and a plan of work
- The plan of work is submitted to the Seaweed Hub Steering Committee for approval
- Applied project funds are made available through UConn. Project activities (consultants, invoices, etc.) will be billed directly to UConn

Symposium Recap Day 1: On the first day of the symposium we identified the “big picture” challenges and opportunities that applied to market opportunities for US seaweed. We discussed that operation scale and market size have considerable impact on challenges and opportunities. We honed in on three categories: small volume “nice markets”, large volume “commodity markets”, and shared/universal challenges.

	Challenges	Opportunities
Shared Challenges	Public is not familiar with seaweed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer education • Develop consumer friendly products • Marketing campaign like other food products
	Competition with other products (ex. specialty vegetables, imported seaweed, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unified messaging to distinguish US seaweed in the market • Use nutritional profiles to form the basis of product stories
	Seaweed contents/nutrition are not accurately reflected in labeling – nutritional profiles are costly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open source consumer information/database – nutritional profiles that are regional, seasonal, etc.
	Seasonal production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value added processing or storage • Diversify species to extend season • Multiple harvests • Markets that extend season (ex. carbon markets)
	Different markets for different species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify end user preferences and target production of desired species

	Challenges	Opportunities
Small Volume “Niche Markets”	Tapping into new markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer education • Distinguish “niche” • Diversify into multiple product lines
	Access to infrastructure/processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with other local products for distribution • Co-op/collective opportunities for processing
	Consumer interest may be short-term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop value-added products that are already familiar to consumers

	Challenges	Opportunities
Large Volume "Commodity Markets"	Need to know/understand markets before producing at scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumer validation, focus groups – life cycle analysis
	Mismatch between "large scale" seaweed operations and "small commodity" markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify points of entry so multiple growers can access • Co-ops to meet demand • Scale operations to meet supply needs
	No supply chain standards/grading exist – large buyers need consistency/quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop protocols for handling, establish quality grade(s) in the marketplace

Symposium Recap Day 2: On day 2 work groups narrowed in on priorities and actions that would address these opportunities. Symposium participants selected:



Discussion/Questions:

- Given that trade association is a high priority, should this group consider joining the ABO since they have been active in the algae space for 10+ years?
 - This is something we can explore potentially through a trade association subgroup
 - National Fisheries Institute may be another model we can look into
 - This effort would need funding to push out a marketing campaign, but there is a concern that the industry isn't big enough to support trade association membership

Based on our discussions at the symposium, we noticed that “market opportunities” and “market development” might address different objectives.

- Poll: Based on the priorities identified, do you think “market opportunities” or “market development” is a better fit for this work group?
 - Market development: 71%
 - Market opportunities (or more discussion needed): 29%

IV. Breakout Group Discussion

Introductions and re-introductions for participants in this virtual work group. In the breakouts, we also asked participants to discuss how they define “market development”.

Reporting out:

- Unified standards would help advance market development, since there is a liability for small companies when selling products to different markets
- Given the 2 year timeframe, we could consider a consumer education campaign
- When it comes to forming a trade association, critical mass and the size of the industry are key challenges. For MAA (Maine Aquaculture Association) and NAA (National Aquaculture Association) species specific groups have not been as effective as broader groups. This effort would need buy-in from the private sector in states with large production (ME, AK) and would need to demonstrate the associations value to businesses. Initial grant funding might be easy to obtain, but there needs to be a business model driven by the private sector for longevity.
- An institute model might be a good fit for what we’ve identified a trade association could take on (aligned marketing, science, research, education). There is a need for scientific information and research to support the growing industry, and the contributors in an institute could be a collaboration between science and industry. This type of science-based collaboration wouldn’t require growing businesses to share proprietary information or strategies
- Some edible species have an established market share and aren’t able to sustain the demand

V. Wrap up and Next Steps

Participants voted on a meeting framework for future meetings. The majority indicated that they would prefer bi-monthly, 1 hour meetings. The group found the breakout group format somewhat useful, and suggested future breakout groups have specific tasks or facilitated activities. There was support for forming smaller subgroups and the majority of participants indicated they would be interested in participating in these conversations.