



MAINE
AQUACULTURE
ASSOCIATION

Maine Aquaculture **Distribution Mapping Manual**



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Introduction

COVID-19 has structurally and fundamentally changed U.S. seafood. Since March 2020, seafood sales have fluctuated, with some species lagging, and others selling above pre-pandemic levels. **Regardless of the quantity sold, how and where seafood was sold changed for all species. Seafood sales and distribution channels have undergone several shifts, and more changes are likely to occur.** Prior to COVID over 80% of seafood in the U.S. was consumed in restaurants, but seafood sales for home consumption rose during the pandemic, and the re-opening of the U.S. greatly increased restaurant sales, if only temporarily.

With the rise of new COVID variants and the likelihood of a COVID-free future dwindling, what will shape the future of U.S. seafood sales and distribution?

Aquaculture producers become farmers because they want to focus on growing their product - not because they want to focus on sales, marketing, and distribution. However, **the pandemic has taken producers down many different paths to make sales and increase cash flow** - with some shifting to retail markets, and others to online, direct to consumer sales.

Each shift possesses a tremendous learning curve. The costs of trial and error are significant, and growers, especially new

growers with low cash reserves, could be forced to close if their exploration does not find suitable methods.

This manual maps the existing and potential distribution options open to Maine growers and estimates their costs and volumes. There is also a focus on trade-offs associated with each method, including the identification of barriers.

The Maine Aquaculture Distribution Manual, authored by Christian Brayden, Denise Gurshin, and Sebastian Belle, is a distribution methods manual that **any grower can pick up and use as a guide to assess which methods will work best for them** based on their business model and geographic location.

Over 20 stakeholders who operate businesses in the seafood, aquaculture, and transportation sectors - producers, wholesalers, distributors, restaurateurs, trucking companies, and more, both in Maine and across the U.S., were interviewed to inform this manual.

While there is no silver bullet for any individual farm, the advice from the experts suggests

three main recommendations* to farmers:

- **Diversify your sales channels**
- **Maintain strong relationships**
- **Keep your product quality consistent**

*See Page 18 for the full recommendations from the report.



COVID-19 Impacts

The arrival of COVID-19 in the U.S. in March of 2020 marked the beginning of **a series of changes for sales and distribution of seafood.** The effects were diverse, as some sectors, such as frozen and shelf-stable seafood, reaped massive increases in sales, while sales for premium, fresh seafood consumed in restaurants, such as lobster, initially collapsed.

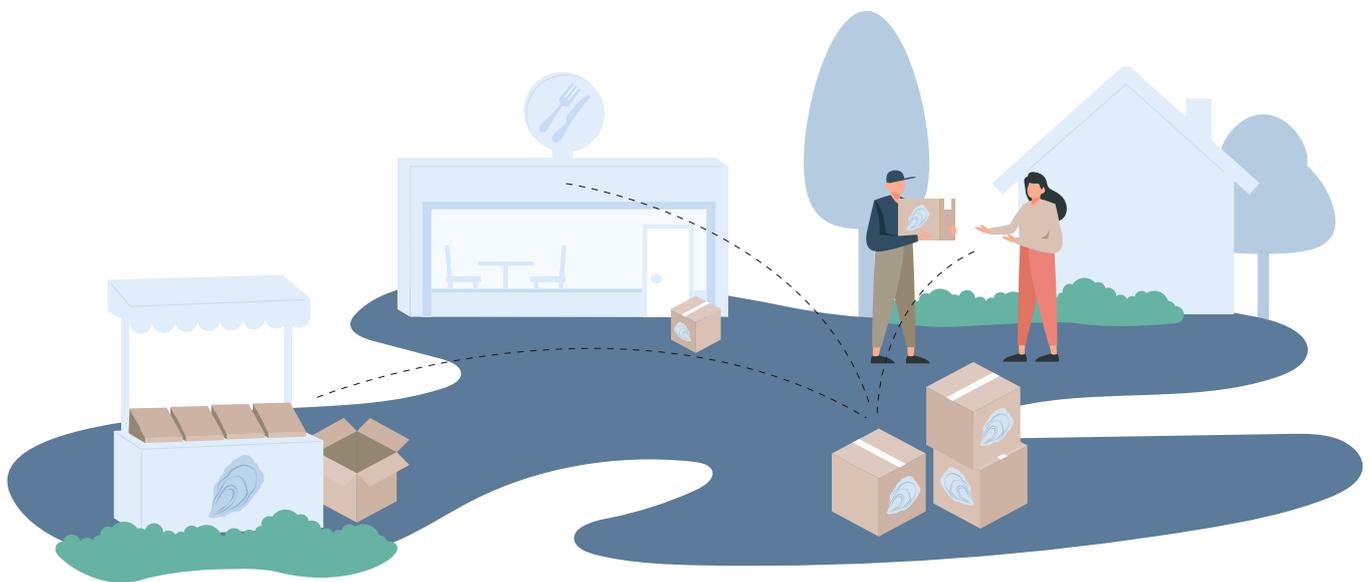
Limited species-specific data for sales during the pandemic exist. Based on retail category data, seafood sales for home consumption appear to have increased dramatically during the pandemic and remain strong. Despite their initial collapse, restaurant sales have rebounded post vaccine rollout. However, given the resurgence of COVID and the emergence of new variants, medium to long-term projections of restaurant sales remain uncertain.

Overall demand for seafood is rising, and optimism remains that the demand will continue to grow.

With sales for home consumption and from restaurants increasing, **the opportunity for moving product looks promising.** However, with uncertainty around COVID variants and the emergence of Maine's small business-oriented aquaculture sector, **the marketplace now has a much higher supply and more competitors.**

While some producers are able to profitably operate using traditional sales and distribution methods within Maine - wholesalers and distributors - others have turned to new methods - direct to consumer and retail sales, among others.

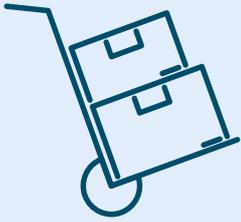
The following section details the tradeoffs of the various sales and distribution methods.



○ Current Distribution Methods

Many options exist for the sale and distribution of Maine aquaculture products. **Producers should not stick to only one method**, as has been demonstrated during the pandemic. It is suggested that **producers moderately diversify their sales and distribution methods**. Only selling direct to restaurants, for example, could cause cash flow issues if restaurant sales slow, or worse, if those restaurants close. On the other hand, selling product via retail, multiple distributors and wholesalers, farmers' markets, online, and direct to restaurants would likely be spreading sales and time too thin. **Spread the risk between multiple sources, but not so many that it detracts from your ability to produce, sell, and collect payments on your product**. Care should be taken to ensure that you have the correct licenses and equipment for each selected distribution method. Please refer to the **Maine DMR website** or contact the Bureau of Public Health at 207.633.9515

The following section details the benefits and drawbacks of the currently available methods:



● Distributor/Wholesaler

Especially as a business grows in volume, it is important to build a relationship with a good, solid distributor/wholesaler. **Build and maintain a relationship with at least two good vendors.** First, it allows you to find out whether or not you are being treated right. Second, it increases your risk diversification. Do not accept being told that you can only work with one distributor/wholesaler at a time. When choosing a distributor/wholesaler, **be certain to understand how they will maintain the quality of your product throughout the supply chain.** Speak with them to make sure that you are partnering with the right distributor/wholesaler who will work through issues with you. Last, verify that they have a good reputation.

PROS



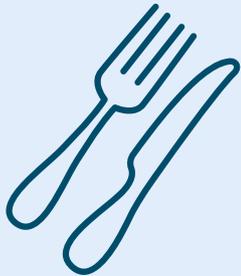
Easy way to regularly move more product and collect timely payments

CONS



Lower price received per unit, less control over product distribution and marketing once sold

● Direct to Restaurant



Restaurants provide farmers with two main options for sales and distribution. The first option is that **some may buy directly from a farmer.**

Some restaurants will deal directly with the farmer, while others may purchase their seafood through a distributor or wholesaler. Selling directly to restaurants has mixed reviews, as on one hand, it allows for detailed control over the distribution and marketing of product, all at a higher price received by the grower. On the other hand, sometimes sales are very limited in scale and, even worse, payments can be late or non-existent. While some may make sales to restaurants in the early stages of their farm, it could become infeasible if production increases. Shellfish certification should be obtained to ensure legal sales directly to restaurants. Some argue that the higher price received is worth the difficulty, while others argue that after the fuel and hassle, there is no money to be made. During the pandemic, food service is looking to do less work in the back of the house due to labor shortages. Although there has been a rebound in restaurant demand, COVID's impacts on this market reinforce the need for growers to diversify sales channels. Some distributors and wholesalers will not work with farmers who are selling directly to restaurants on their distribution list. The second option is that **farmers open their own restaurant** to sell their own product, or perhaps the products of others as well. This comes with all of the risks, benefits, and commitments of owning and operating a restaurant.

PROS



High price, brand recognition, and local sales

CONS



Slow to receive payment, payments lost, time and effort to track and collect payments, limited quantity of sales, typically must deliver each order, additional costs and investment necessary to deliver product

● Pop-up/Catering



Many options exist in the food service pop-up/cart/events category of sales and distribution. They could range from pop-up stands at breweries and concerts to carts stationed on city corners and catering weddings with portable raw bars. **The options are nearly endless, but two aspects are consistent: time and effort invested in the event.** These events typically include hands-on work by the farmer, and sometimes hired hands as well. Typically, this is geared towards oyster shucking, but could apply to other shellfish and seaweed as well. Considerations must be made for investment in the equipment and licenses to sell at events, along with the time and effort needed to haul, set up, and tear down the equipment, often on weekends and at night. The high prices offer the potential for significant money to be made if the number of people and the clientele are right. But the uncertainty in the quantity of sales and time invested in the events leaves some referring to it as “a lot of work for not a ton of money.” The scale and frequency of such large events, which are the primary method needed for this type of sales and distribution to be successful, may remain limited due to COVID-19.

PROS



Very high price, marketing, brand recognition, local sales, farmer-to-customer interaction

CONS



Money invested in equipment and licenses, time and effort off the farm, potential outside labor costs

● Co-op



Small marketing co-ops tend to operate in one geographical location, meaning that growers from a certain area pool their product to market it under that name e.g. Cow Cove Oysters. Further differentiation can occur, for example noting that this specific type of Cow Cove Oysters are the Pine Pitch Petites from Pine Tree Sea Farm. This piecemeal approach can streamline the sales and distribution process for farmers, as potentially a dedicated sales person/team could control the sales, distribution, marketing, and payment. Successful co-ops tend to have at least one dedicated staff who focuses on logistics, sales, and administration in addition to voluntary grower participation. It has also been suggested that **Maine producers should form a state-wide marketing board to promote Maine products and form a co-op that can consolidate product into meaningful volume and justify a dedicated sales force.** Co-ops can provide an **easier way to work together to sell more product through efficiencies.** However, the grower does sacrifice a small portion of control over exactly where the product is sold. Similarly, this could be done in co-packing for distribution.

PROS



Ease of sale, price could be slightly above typical wholesale/distributor price, company and co-op brand recognition

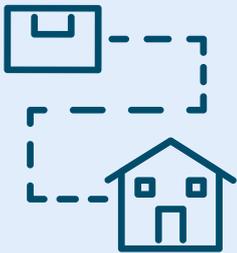
CONS



Need significant enough volume to justify operation, slightly less control over product, additional cost of full or part-time staff to run co-op

● Home Delivery/Online Sales

This is a relatively new method of sales and distribution for Maine aquaculture shellfish and seaweed. Up until the pandemic, it was tested on a very limited scale. Since the pandemic, it has been tried more often, sometimes as a last-ditch effort to bring cash in the door during tough times. For some, it has been tested as a potentially permanent revenue stream. **It is predicted that this market will continue to grow**, with even greater potential for growth depending on the impacts of COVID-19. Price received is high, but margins are low, and there is a lot of work to be done for packaging and shipping the product.



Temperature must be maintained for the entire shipment, and product must arrive clean, and in excellent condition. Extra gel packs are cheaper than re-shipping or, worse, losing a customer. **A moderate amount of product can be moved, but scale is still limited.** It is likely that a certain level of sales must be achieved in order for it to be profitable. For local home delivery, there is either notable time and effort put in by the owner or employee, or a driver needs to be hired. Given the already high prices paid by consumers, and low margins for producers, this market holds potential concerns around price sensitivity to high prices.

The money to be made is in the add-ons: knives, gloves, etc. This delivery sales method was essentially non-existent pre-COVID-19, but presents the potential for farmers and/or distributors to move a substantial amount of product, with a lot of repeat customers, and a lot of time invested by the grower/business owner.

Care should be taken to ensure you have the correct licenses and equipment for direct sales to consumers. Please refer to the **Maine DMR website** or contact the Bureau of Public Health at 207.633.9515



High price received, build relationship with local customers, expand geographically through online sales and shipping



A lot of time and money to establish sales system, pack, and deliver/ship product, low margins, price sensitivity, challenging to ensure that product arrives clean and in excellent condition, the last mile can destroy a shipment



● Direct to Retail

Selling directly to a retail brick and mortar seafood shop, offers a way to target at-home consumers, often locally. Local retail may not sell a huge volume of product or bring in the highest price, but **it can be a way to gain brand recognition and build demand in a given area**. Seafood retail sales have grown throughout the pandemic, and it is suspected that they will continue to remain higher than pre-pandemic levels. It should be noted that, in this context, retail refers to smaller brick and mortar shops, not club stores e.g. Sam's Club. However, some Maine aquaculture producers have worked with grocery chains, e.g. Hannaford, where producer ROI may be slightly lower, risk and volumes higher, and costs comparable to selling to a seafood shop.

PROS

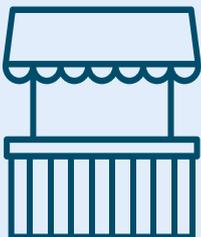


Brand recognition, local sales, targeted area sales, price higher than distributor/wholesaler

CONS



Price lower than direct sales, lower volumes, cannot guarantee how quickly product will move



● Farmers' Market

Farmers' markets offer **a great opportunity, especially for newer growers, to interact with the community, build their brand, and promote their product**. While they may not offer a huge volume of sales, they **can build integration into the community and repeat customers**, who may spread the word about the product. Similarly, a farm stand could be set up at the producer's place of business. Both are great stepping stones, and an additional revenue source. But a business cannot survive solely as a farm stand, whether at the market or at home.

Care should be taken to ensure you have the correct licenses and equipment for direct sales to consumers. Please refer to the **Maine DMR website** or contact the Bureau of Public Health at 207.633.9515

PROS



Local promotion, brand recognition, community integration, high price per unit

CONS



A lot of time and work, limited sales

● Tours



Tours present **an alternative to traditional sales and distribution methods**. Typically, farmers, with the appropriate vessel and licenses, will bring customers out on their farm for a full experience, which may include sales and consumption of their product, and potentially those of other farmers, as part of the fixed price of the tour, or for purchase while on the boat. This is a relatively new method being tested out by farmers. Others will work with local tour companies, who will schedule stops on their farm to speak with customers and sell their products. The downside, similar to other event-based sales, is that time is taken away from the farm, and **time and effort must be put into preparing the product and ensuring the enjoyment of customers**. The risks associated with farm tours - including passenger safety, proper licensing, and the cost of liability insurance, must be considered as well.

Care should be taken to ensure you have the correct licenses and equipment for hosting and selling directly to consumers. Please refer to the **Maine DMR website**, the U.S. Coast Guard, or contact the **Bureau of Public Health** at 207.633.9515

Seek out initiatives, such as the **Maine Oyster Trail**, to put your business and the experiences it offers on the map.



Potential for notable income, customer interaction, repeat customers, social media marketing



Time, licenses, proper equipment, uncertainty around number of customers, limited quantity of sales, cost of liability insurance, risk associated with farm tours

Current Distribution Methods Summary

The table below shows an overview of the costs, volumes, return on investment (ROI), and financial risk associated with each method.

This information is based on the average aquaculture business.

Each business must assess the impact of its physical farm location on each category.

For example, a business must gauge the costs for shipping, and thus its impacts on ROI and the other categories, as a farm located just outside of Portland will have notably different costs than a farm shipping from Downeast.

	Costs	Volumes	ROI	Risk
Distributor/Wholesaler	Low	High	Moderate	Moderate
Direct to Restaurant	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High
Pop-up/Catering	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Co-op	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Low/Moderate
Home Delivery/Online sales	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Direct to Retail	Low	Low/Moderate	Moderate	Low
Farmers' Market	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
Tours	Low	Low	Low	Low



○ Potential Distribution Methods

While the above listed sales and distribution methods have been tested in Maine, **the following have been identified as potential new methods.** As product supply and market saturation increase in Maine, methods such as these, which look beyond Maine and New England, are important for expanding the geography of sales.

If you have questions about any of the following methods or interest in pursuing them, please contact Christian Brayden at Christian@maineaqua.org.



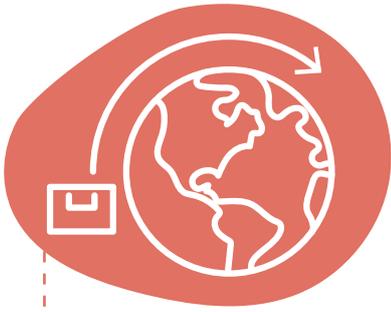
○
Maine aquaculture growers and organizations could come together to organize LTL routes and collectively fund the service.

● Less-Than-Truckload (LTL)

LTL has been tested in Maine before - in Waldoboro from 1986 to 2013 - but at that time, it was not profitable. Since then, oyster production alone has more than doubled. **LTL could combine product from several farmers, and then typically carry them to a distribution center** e.g. LTL pick-ups in Ellsworth and Damariscotta to bring a load of shellfish to Araho, **from where shellfish are stored and further distributed.** It is possible that a trucking company could add an LTL route, but it has historically been tough to maintain at a profit for the company.

There needs to be a routine to the service, roughly 12-16 pallets per load, and consistency with timing, especially for shellfish and seaweed - both products with a short shelf life. Some companies are, or were, doing seafood LTL, including Linda Bean's and Bay & Bay transportation. Alternatively, **Maine aquaculture growers and organizations could come together to organize LTL routes and collectively fund the service.** Similarly, this could be done on a special event basis, such as subcontracting trucks during surges e.g. Fourth of July.

If Maine, or if certain growers/regions develop strong footholds in markets beyond New England, this, paired with other methods such as transfer docks, could present **a strong opportunity for cooperation and streamlining distribution.** However, drivers are currently limited, and as such, LTL's are limited, and refrigerated-wet LTL's are even tougher to locate during COVID.



Maine aquaculture products hold the potential for a large volume of sales and increased worldwide brand recognition.



The farmer would be outsourcing their product's packing services.

Exporting

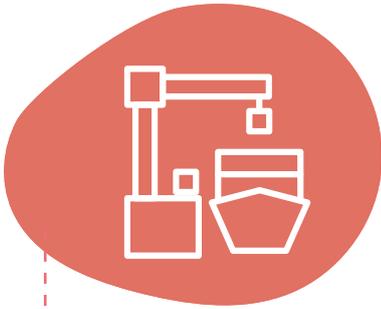
The U.S. is a major seafood exporter, and Maine is a notable contributor. Lobsters, for example, have far-reaching international markets, where they garner luxury prices. This could also be feasible for Maine aquaculture products. However, the first step is to address the laws and regulations, which **do not currently allow for live Maine shellfish exports to Europe**, although trials for other states are starting. Additionally, tariff changes, biosecurity protocols, public health regulations, and shipping delays, especially during the pandemic, could add significant levels of uncertainty to foreign sales, including those in Canada.

There could be a strong market for Maine's high quality aquaculture products, especially given the notoriety of lobster, but exporting will require a significant long-term commitment and investment in proper infrastructure. However, **it does hold the potential for a large volume of sales and increased worldwide brand recognition.** Be sure to find an experienced customs broker and a freight forwarder who know seafood well. Be prepared for a lot of follow-up phone calls. Be sure to choose reliable partners in other countries. Use resources such as the **U.S. commercial service** and the **Maine International Trade Center** to make local connections with reputable buyers and use letter of credit to ensure payments.

Co-packing

Co-packing is another way of referring to contract packing. That is to say, **the farmer would be outsourcing their product's packing services. It would only make sense for a producer to work with a co-packer if the co-packer were also handling the product distribution.**

There would need to be a large volume to economically justify such efforts. It is a practice often done in manufacturing and with value-added food and seafood products. It could help to streamline larger sales volumes or value-added processes, but loss of control over the final product is also a factor to consider.



Large volumes of product could be moved in this fashion, and in theory, at higher margins.

● **Transfer Docks**

Transfer docks, such as Araho in Boston, or the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York, allow for **direct control of product to be distributed regionally, or throughout the country**. They have been used for decades for various types of seafood, especially finfish. Care should be taken to ensure each transfer dock has the appropriate, clean, and fully licensed storage and transfer facilities. Special attention should be paid to the facilities ability to maintain appropriate temperatures and chain of custody records.

Transfer docks allow farmers to, on their own or with other farmers, pay a small fee to keep product in the dock's cold storage until it is able to be loaded onto the correct trucks for its distribution. **Large volumes of product can be moved in this fashion, and in theory, at higher margins**, because it may bypass a wholesaler or distributor.

It would require much more work and coordination for the logistics. But, working with other growers, for example, may also allow the **build up of a standing inventory at a transfer dock, which could then be used to develop a steady, regular route for product distribution**.

Potential Distribution Methods Summary

The table below shows an overview of the costs, volumes, return on investment (ROI), and financial risk associated with each method.

This information is based on the average aquaculture business. **Each business must assess the impact of its physical farm location on each category.**

For example, a business must gauge the distance to reach export ports, or proximity to other farms to gauge the potential of participating in an LTL program, and to assess impacts on cost, ROI and the other categories, as a farm located just outside of Portland will have notably different costs and options available compared to a farm Downeast.

	Costs	Volumes	ROI	Risk
LTL	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Exporting	High	High	High	High
Transfer Docks	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Co-packing	High	High	Moderate	High

Where to Look for New Sales



High-quality aquaculture products, such as those coming from Maine, resonate well with foodies.

Demographics

Consumers of seafood, especially shellfish and seaweed, tend to have higher educational attainment as well as higher household income. Other factors, such as consumption of seafood, health-oriented behaviors, and looking closely at labels indicate an increased likelihood of seafood purchasing.

This is also true for awareness of aquaculture, as those with higher degrees of awareness of or familiarity with aquaculture are more likely to purchase aquaculture products. Some studies have also found younger consumers to be more likely to purchase, for example, oysters at a restaurant. **High-quality aquaculture products, such as those coming from Maine, also resonate well with foodies** and those interested in farm or sea-to-table foods.



It is important for growers to collectively cultivate a Maine state brand.

Branding

It is important for growers to collectively cultivate a Maine state brand e.g. Maine Oysters, and to personally carve out a niche within that larger brand. **Product promotion** is encouraged to gain brand recognition, whether it be through pop-ups, breweries, features on menus, or other methods. **Social media marketing and promotion**, along with a strong website, can play a significant role as well. The concept of a larger brand with recognizable names within each brand is similar to what is seen in fine wines or cheeses - other premium products with specific emphasis on place of origin. For example, branding can occur on several levels, such as with the French wine, Romanee-Conti (vineyard), a Pinot Noir (type of grape) that comes from the Côte de Nuits (subregion) of Burgundy (region). Stakeholders, especially those from out of state, have emphasized the need to **create a collective “Maine” brand for aquaculture products**, especially given its already existing reputation for high-quality seafood out-of-state. Specific areas in Maine could also create collective brands, perhaps based on geography e.g. Damariscotta.



Both shellfish and seaweed can be used as compost.

● Secondary Revenue Streams

Alternative revenue streams exist for Maine aquaculture products. These include some higher value-added processes such as cosmetics, nutraceuticals, and food ingredients. Other lower value options also exist, including **shell processing or hardscaping for shellfish, fertilizer use for seaweed, and compost use for either product, among others.**

Research continues to explore alternative manufacturing, industrial, and agricultural uses for these natural products as well, such as **seaweed in cow feed.** Some states use large quantities of **shells for coastal restoration**, but the process for the shells to be safely transferred is timely and not without cost.

Many of these methods, for the time being, remain for products with defects, meaning that they cannot be sold at standard market price for consumption.

Other Considerations

Transportation Industry



Air Transportation

There are many options to transport product out of Maine, but for those looking to take on more of the distribution themselves, the challenges of different transportation industries cannot be overlooked. **Airfare is expensive and risky.** Especially during COVID, labor shortages are widespread, and a flight being delayed can leave product spoiling on the hot tarmac. **Putting the product on the flight is only half of the battle** - the right person is needed on the other side to receive, ship, and pay for it. Even with the right people on both sides of the transaction, be prepared for a lot of phone calls, creative thinking, and hustling. **Air transportation can move product far and quickly, but** unless rates are negotiated and quantity is substantial, **it can be difficult to maintain positive margins on sales.** This would lead many to then think of trucking, as 130 million U.S. consumers are located within a 24-hour drive of Maine.



Ground Transportation

Several factors play into the challenge and expense of transporting seafood. It is temperature-sensitive, and it may carry an odor, moisture, or possible allergens. As such, many carriers are not willing to transport it, for the associated efforts and cleaning can be labor-intensive and expensive. Trucking seafood has been complicated by the driver shortage over the past four years, along with increases in prices for diesel and trucking-related equipment. Some freight costs have increased slightly, and others by several hundred percent. Truck availability is now much more challenging than before COVID-19, with fewer routes and trucks filling up faster, trucking is busier than ever. **There has been an increase in co-packing and use of transfer docks as well, likely in response to these challenges.** Common carrier seafood trucks, such as those going from Boston to Chicago, Minneapolis, and Denver, etc. could be approached as well. Less-than-truckload service (LTL), as mentioned above, is more of a niche, with few companies specializing in it. But it could be organized with an established route, as its profitability has yet to be tested with a more established volume of product leaving Maine. However, this would take notable collective organization from either a group of producers or from someone within or working with a trucking company.





Quality Standards

One theme that emerged across nearly all industry stakeholders involved in this work was the recommendation to **keep quality high and consistent**. It matters on the individual farm level, where marketing begins. But for the Maine aquaculture brand, it is paramount.

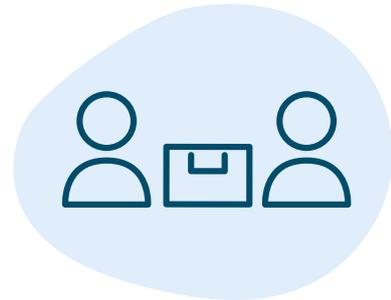
For individual farmers, there are small adages, such as waiting until product is 100% ready to sell, do not sacrifice the quality of product on a cheap box, and develop internal standards based on your target customers. For the Maine aquaculture brand, it is this last factor that is crucial - **develop long-term standards**. For oysters, for example, it could focus on cup depth, liquor, plumpness of meat, meat-to-shell ratio, and overall appearance.

Regardless of the metrics selected, they must highlight what separates a Maine aquaculture product from a product that any U.S. consumer could purchase. While this is separate from the branding mentioned above, it is also an integral part of **creating and maintaining the Maine aquaculture brand**. This is a collective brand that benefits growers across the state. Individual growers, for the sake of their own business, should hold themselves to a high, consistent standard.

Work with your state producers' association to develop quality standards for the sector and ensure that the Maine brand is protected and promoted.

Recommendations

After speaking with industry experts from Maine and beyond, their recommendations for growers, and especially new growers, are highlighted below.

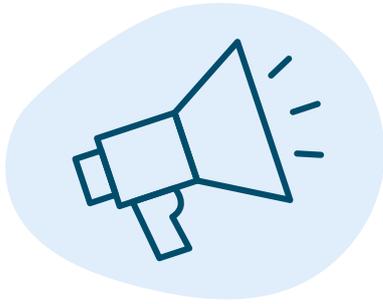


Start Small

When launching an aquaculture farm **keep it simple and keep it small**. There is no need to immediately attempt to reach full build-out scale. It is impractical. You will make mistakes. Keep consequences low.

Start small and ensure the quality and consistency of your product. Be persistent in following warm leads, and don't sacrifice the quality of your product on cheap packaging. When sales start, **do not be afraid to experiment** with pop-ups, breweries, farmers' markets, and nearby restaurants.

Small amounts will likely be sold at these events, but it promotes you and your business name. **Do research before committing to any large volume sales, and test shipments and other sales methods before signing long-term contracts.**



Marketing - Sell the Story

Connect with customers, whether virtually or in-person, **and tell your story**. Tell customers who you are, how you came to be an aquaculturist, and why you are passionate about your product. **Sell your story, and sell Maine**, especially when reaching out of state. Use the media (and social media), and play to your strengths.

Build a website with an easy, simple layout, and high-quality photos. Keep messaging clear. List your hours and reliable methods of contact. **If your product is sustainable, make sure that the customer knows it. If your product is high-quality, make sure that the customer knows it.** Pop-ups, breweries, and farmers' markets, as mentioned above, provide great opportunities to connect with customers on a one-on-one basis, which is often a connection that customers crave - making them more likely to come back another time, and possibly spread the word amongst their networks. In tourist-heavy states such as Maine, this can spread the word of you and your business well beyond the state.

If you are going to sell branded merchandise, check with local teenagers and young adults to see if they would wear that style of clothing before you make a large purchase - you want your staff and others to be wearing your merchandise and spreading brand awareness. The website's store must be secure and user-friendly. Offer bundles as suggestions or specials.



Maintain Product Quality and Quality Relationships

It is crucial to **establish and ensure your product quality upon your first harvest**. It is equally important to create an internal set of standards to ensure that you **maintain high quality standards**, especially as more people begin working on your farm.

As sales begin to increase, find at least two good distributors/wholesalers who you can trust, and build a relationship with them. They will help you move a larger volume of product. Having two allows you to gauge when you are being treated right, and increase risk diversification.

When choosing a distributor/wholesaler, **be sure to understand how they will maintain the quality of your product throughout the supply chain**. Also, be certain to partner with the right wholesalers/distributors for you - those who will work through issues with you and ensure smooth operation for both parties. Verify that they have a good reputation before committing. Spend money on packaging, which protects your product during transportation. Think what the packaging will look like when a chef pulls the last piece of product from it. Packaging also offers another opportunity for branding.

Maintain relationships with customers, and make sure they always receive consistent, high-quality product. Diversify your customer base, but do not always prospect for new customers. It is important to maintain strong relationships with those who consistently purchase your product.



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