

**Statement of Christopher V. Davis, Ph.D., Executive Director
Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center
before the
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and the
Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement & Business**

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

The Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center was created by the Legislature in 1988 with the mission of developing economically and environmentally sustainable aquaculture opportunities in Maine. Over the past thirty-three years, the MAIC has supported over 400 research projects and has held numerous workshops, briefings, conferences, and other educational events, all designed to inform the public concerning the economic development potential of commercial aquaculture, and the challenges facing Maine finfish, shellfish and seaweed farmers. The MAIC also manages, in partnership with the University of Maine, an aquaculture business incubator program with facilities in Franklin and Walpole.

The MAIC *sponsors and facilitates* innovative research and development projects involving food and other products from sustainable aquaculture systems; *invests* in the enhancement of aquaculture capacity in Maine; *serves* as a source of educational information to enhance public visibility and acceptance of aquaculture; and *encourages* strategic alliances tasked with promoting research, technology transfer, and the commercialization of aquaculture research.



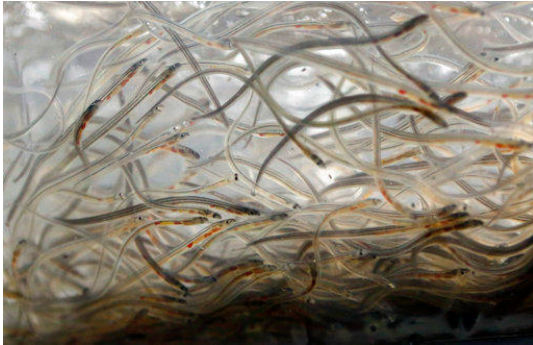
Most of the activities supported by the MAIC are done in collaboration with stakeholder organizations. Our primary partners include the Maine Sea Grant Program, SEAMaine, Focus Maine, the Down East Institute for Applied Marine Research and Education, the Maine Aquaculture Association, the Maine Technology Institute, the University of Maine including the UM Aquaculture Research Institute, the Maine Center for Entrepreneurial Development, the Maine Departments of Marine Resources and Community & Economic Development, the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Agriculture and the World Wildlife Fund.

Legislative support has always been critical to the MAIC's success. The Center and its Board of Directors work hard to identify projects and activities that apply sound science to industry problems and that address questions about aquaculture posed by the public. Every effort is made to keep administrative costs to an absolute minimum. Christopher Davis serves as the Executive Director and works out of donated space at the University of Maine's Darling Marine Center in Walpole. State appropriated funds managed by the MAIC are re-granted to research teams working on industry challenges, ranging from disease prevention to the introduction of new cultured species. The minimum project award/match ratio is 1:1, but over the past ten years, has averaged \$2.25 in matched funds for every dollar expended by the Center. Examples of recent MAIC research projects include: 1) development of culture methods for the emerging sea scallop industry, 2) development of a low-cost real-time environmental monitoring buoy, 3) development of best practices and tools for Maine aquaculture farmer improve the social acceptability of their farm operations, and 4) an interactive aquaculture e-book curriculum for use in our workforce development efforts. Furthermore, Legislative support for the MAIC has allowed it to leverage additional federal funds for projects directly benefiting the Maine industry such as recent USDA funding to support job training and



curriculum development efforts to benefit commercial fishermen and others wanting to diversify their incomes and/or create new aquaculture businesses.

The MAIC manages the biennially-held Northeast Aquaculture Conference & Exposition (NACE) – now the Northeast’s largest aquaculture meeting. In 2018, the NACE convened in Boston and brought together about 600 industry producers, vendors, researchers, managers, investors and students to discuss emerging issues affecting the industry. Although COVID-19 has postponed our next NACE, plans are underway to convene in January 2022 in Portland.



The MAIC in partnership with the University of Maine currently manages the aquaculture business incubator program which provides startup businesses and entrepreneurs with 1) unique facilities to conduct research leading to new aquaculture products, 2) technical, business and financial assistance and 3) direct access to University of Maine academic and research resources. Some of the many Maine businesses that have used this program include Kennebec River BioSciences, Sea & Reef Aquaculture, Mook Sea Farms, Acadia Harvest, Inc., BioProcess Algae, Inc. and most recently, American Unagi, Maine Fresh Seafarm, Maine

Shellfish Developers and Aqualine, LLC. Financial support for the incubator program is provided in part by the Applied Technology Development Center System administered by the DECD and additional support from the Maine Technology Institute.

In summary, the MAIC is working in a variety of ways to help Maine’s aquaculture industry grow and prosper and on behalf of the MAIC Board of Directors, I would like to express our appreciation for the legislative support we have received in past years and hope that the Legislature will continue to fund this important program in the next biennium.