

Project Summary/Abstract

Project Title: **Assessment of regional U.S. consumer attitudes and preferences about domestic farm-raised seaweed.**

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The Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center (MAIC) proposes to conduct a comprehensive, nationwide consumer insights survey on edible seaweed and value-added products that will prove highly valuable in locating promising markets for U.S. farmed seaweed. Survey data will be used to develop an interactive data dashboard for use by seaweed farmers, distributors, wholesalers, aquaculture researchers, and Extension professionals.

Edible seaweed can provide income diversification for aquaculture operators as well as fishermen struggling in the wild-catch industry due to the collapse of fisheries from warming waters, habitat degradation, and invasive species. However, little consumer research has been conducted on seaweed, leaving stakeholders in need of insights data on which to base market-driven decision making that will result in increased revenues and higher profitability for seaweed farmers and value-added producers.

This work directly supports the Program Priority Area: Economic research for increasing commercial aquaculture profitability. The consumer research we conduct will provide the critical market data necessary to support new and established aquaculture operators entering the farmed seaweed market. As fisheries become increasingly less stable and more regulations are put in place on capture quotas and size restrictions, fishermen can turn to this highly valuable, emerging market. Regional data on consumption habits, preferences, and willingness to pay that can be filtered by demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and income-level will enable seaweed farmers to target the most profitable market segments for their products, or to tailor their product offerings and volumes to specific regions.