

Alaska's Seafood Future Action Agenda MARCH 2021

Alaska's seafood industry is critical to the resilience of coastal communities across the state. Sustaining this valuable industry in Alaska will require a skilled seafood workforce, young people who pursue seafood careers, and applied research to support innovation and solve technical questions and challenges.

Alaska's seafood industry is the state's largest private workforce with approximately 60,000 individuals directly employed in harvesting and processing each year. Annually, Alaska's seafood enterprise contributes over \$172M in taxes, fees and self-assessments to fund state, local and federal governments. Seafood harvesting and processing are often the primary source of private income and jobs in many coastal communities.¹

Alaska's seafood processing industry, with over 166 shore-based plants, 49 catcher-processor vessels and 10 large floating processors, accounts for 70% of Alaska's manufacturing employment with 26,000 workers annually. While many of these workers are seasonal and come from outside our state, approximately 7,500 Alaskans participate in the seafood processing workforce. Over 40 occupations are supported by the processing sector.¹

However, the seafood processing industry and its workforce are not widely understood in Alaska and are underserved and underrepresented in the three focus areas of this project: workforce training opportunities, youth career exposure and applied research.

Alaska's Seafood Future: Community Resilience through Workforce Development and Research Innovation is a project of the Alaska Research Consortium (ARC), a community/industry

organization, with support from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and industry contributors and partners. The project is focused on creating a coordinated and collaborative approach among public and private entities to:

- ✓ Develop a Seafood Workforce Training Program in Alaska
- ✓ Engage Alaska's Youth in Seafood Processing Careers
- ✓ Re-establish Seafood Applied Research in Alaska

To develop this Action Agenda, ARC surveyed seafood processing leaders, receiving responses from 46 seafood plant managers and three catcher/processor companies, representing over 15,000 workers. Ongoing programs were reviewed and gaps were identified. Draft action steps were developed with our project partners and further enhanced through discussions with stakeholders from industry, government, community groups and educational institutions. The full report outlines the project and provides details on each action step.

¹The Economic Value of Alaska's Seafood Industry, January 2020. Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute

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Fundamental to all of these action steps are three overall recommendations:

- Recognize the economic value and workforce impact of Alaska's seafood industry across the state.
- Develop relationships and build partnerships between the Alaska seafood industry, researchers, educators/trainers and governments.
- Commit time and funding to support Alaska's seafood industry and workforce.

Develop a Seafood Workforce Training Program in Alaska

Alaska's seafood processing industry often uses on-the-job training for its workforce, but that alone is not enough to meet its needs. As markets and products change, regulatory requirements grow, technical operations become more complex, and

personnel turns over, there is a consistent demand for both basic and advanced training. However, seafood workforce training opportunities in Alaska are minimal for the approximately 26,000 seafood processing industry workers.

ACTION STEPS

1. Align workforce training with employer and employee needs.
2. Encourage funding sources to target and support seafood processing workforce training.
3. Use the University of Alaska's Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center (KSMSC) as a hub for seafood workforce training while also offering targeted classes elsewhere in the state.
4. Amplify and improve existing, related programs offered by the University of Alaska (UA), Alaska Vocational Technical Center (AVTEC) and other training centers to include the seafood processing industry.
5. Develop new programs to fill gaps in seafood processing workforce training needs.
6. Actively recruit from training programs to industry positions.
7. Consider development of an intensive, and possibly credentialed "Seafood Processing Career Academy".

Engage Alaska's Youth in Seafood Processing Careers

Increasing the employment of Alaska residents in skilled seafood processing industry careers is a primary focus of the Alaska's Seafood Future project. Skilled occupations provide higher wages, opportunity for advancement and year-round employment. Alaskans can and should fill these positions. Creating awareness among young people about the careers available in the seafood processing industry points them to future employment opportunities and provides encouragement for them to remain in the state. This contributes to community resilience and stability.



ACTION STEPS

1. Commit time and funding to provide seafood career exposure for Alaska's youth.
2. Develop relationships between seafood companies and local schools and regional training centers. Create formal school-business partnerships on a local or regional basis.
3. Create and share information about seafood processing careers with young people.
4. Refresh and regularly update the Seafood Career Streams information at the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.
5. Ensure inclusion of Alaska's seafood industry in the state's Career and Technical Education (CTE) Plan and related state and national CTE programs and resources.
6. Explore development of a comprehensive youth seafood processing careers program or ensure that seafood careers become part of an established program.

Re-establish Seafood Applied Research in Alaska

Currently, there are no University of Alaska researchers who work on seafood quality, product development, byproduct use, full utilization and process technology. Limited partnerships between Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory faculty members and researchers from other universities have resulted in some work on seafood product development and quality control. However, much work remains undone due to a lack of capacity for seafood science research at the University of Alaska system. This is concerning since seafood processing represents over 70% of the state's manufacturing sector. The Alaska's Seafood Future project found that many seafood managers in Alaska recognize the need for research, but do not understand how to relay priorities to researchers and help get the research conducted.

ACTION STEPS

1. Develop an ongoing and consistent way to identify and prioritize Alaska seafood research and development needs.
2. Leverage the mission and facilities of the Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center to develop an applied seafood research/ocean cluster hub for Alaska.
3. Leverage private and public funds to support research of importance to Alaska's seafood industry.
4. Expand research focus areas to represent the multi-dimensions of "Alaska seafood."

Next Steps

The Alaska's Seafood Future Action Agenda, designed to support Alaska's seafood processing industry through workforce training, youth career awareness and seafood applied research, is the product of over 18 months of work by the Alaska Research Consortium. What happens next, and when, will depend on leadership, commitment and action by the Alaska seafood processing industry; local, tribal, state and federal governments; the University of Alaska; AVTEC and other regional training centers; and local schools and communities. The Alaska Research Consortium will advocate for these steps to be enacted, recognizing the vital role of the Alaska seafood processing industry in the state's economy and the well-being of our communities.