



For Immediate Release

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## **FOCUSMAINE AND EDUCATE MAINE LAUNCH AQUACULTURE PIONEERS PROGRAM**

PORTLAND, Maine (February 3, 2021)—FocusMaine and Educate Maine are piloting a new program aimed at providing a pathway to long-term careers in Maine's aquaculture sector. The Aquaculture Pioneers Program, a two-year effort funded through a \$382,504 grant from the Builders Initiative, will be launched this spring.

The Aquaculture Pioneers Program addresses a documented and immediate need for talent in an industry that is now providing the majority of seafood for global consumers. This paid internship program will connect aquaculture businesses to new talent and create a culture of professional training, building on principles and practices of long-term stewardship of Maine's ocean resources.

"Training a new generation of aquaculturalists who understand the power of restorative aquaculture is central to the health of our oceans," said Peter Bryant, Senior Program Officer of the Builders Initiative. Our support for this project will introduce young people in Maine to career opportunities in aquaculture while also instilling a deep appreciation for sustainably harvested foods and healthy ecosystems."

The Aquaculture Pioneers Program builds on three foundational initiatives at FocusMaine:

The first is Maine Career Catalyst, an experiential learning program designed to introduce interns as well as apprentices and co-op students to the array of career opportunities and the high quality of life in Maine. The program, another joint effort of FocusMaine and Educate Maine, has served more than 2,000 interns and 90 companies since 2017 and has already supported over 100 young adults interested in aquaculture.

The second is a series of investments in FocusMaine’s aquaculture implementation partners – the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, the Maine Aquaculture Association, and Educate Maine – to build the talent pipeline and identify the skills needed to grow the industry.

The third effort is the Seafood Accelerator for Maine (SEAMaine). FocusMaine, along with the University of Maine, the Maine Technology Institute, and others, helped to launch this statewide initiative with funding from the US Economic Development Administration to create a line of sight into the future of Maine’s marine economy.

Students from Maine’s community colleges will be the initial target audience with a goal of increasing diversity and equity in the sector. The program will provide paid, hands-on, meaningful experiences that afford students professional opportunities while also helping businesses build a pipeline for new talent. The Aquaculture Pioneers Program will introduce students to industry standards and best practices for sustainability and ocean conservation while providing a pathway to emerging apprenticeship programs.

“Our vision in launching the Aquaculture Pioneers Program is to fuel the growth of Maine’s sustainable aquaculture industry with new skills and a new generation of leaders who understand the value of our ocean-based economy,” said Dr. Kimberly Hamilton. “The Pioneers Program provides one important step on a career journey and another important contribution to strengthening the talent pipeline for Maine’s aquaculture industry.”

Hamilton also noted, “We know through our work with many partners and from the Maine Aquaculture Workforce Development Strategy that practical know-how is of utmost importance to businesses and that on-the-job training supported by formal, competency-based training is what employers are looking for. The study notes, in particular, that one of the barriers to recruiting and retaining talent is the ‘lack of clear and well-communicated career progression opportunities.’ This is a part of the solution to that problem.”

“Internships give students the chance to explore industries and employers, and to make connections that will help them achieve their career goals,” said Kate Howell, Program Director of Educate Maine. “This program will not only allow students interested in Maine Aquaculture to connect with industry leaders and gain valuable skills but also give businesses the opportunity to bring in key talent to help them drive their business and the industry forward.”

Globally, aquaculture is the fastest-growing form of food production on earth, accounting for more than half of all fish captured or produced for human consumption. Although the U.S. is the third-largest market for seafood in the world, it lags the rest of the world in fish production and imports 91 percent of its seafood. This reliance on other countries and markets poses

substantial risks to the security of the U.S. food system, to food safety, and to efforts aimed at reducing greenhouse gasses and minimizing the impacts of climate change and over-fishing.

“The Aquaculture Pioneers program is an important component in the state's ongoing development of a diverse and competitive aquaculture sector. Students who gain hands-on experience through the program will have a significant advantage as they seek employment with our members,” said Sebastian Belle, Executive Director of Maine Aquaculture Association.

Maine is uniquely positioned to help solve this global challenge. Aquaculture has taken root in Maine—in off-shore beds, in open waters, and, increasingly, on land—to take advantage of the state's abundant land, water, and marine resources. Between 2007 and 2020, employment in Maine's aquaculture sector grew nearly 200 percent.

#### **About FocusMaine:**

FocusMaine is a private sector-led initiative to accelerate the creation of quality jobs in Maine by investing in three of Maine's globally competitive and high-growth fields--agriculture, aquaculture, and biopharmaceuticals—and by strengthening Maine's workforce capacity. FocusMaine partners with a number of Maine organizations to spur business growth within those sectors. Together with its partners, FocusMaine catalyzes sustainable growth and business confidence that energizes Maine's economy. For more information, visit [www.focusmaine.org](http://www.focusmaine.org).

#### **About Educate Maine:**

Educate Maine champions career readiness by increasing the educational attainment of Maine people, enabling all students to succeed in postsecondary education and in the workplace. As a business-led education advocacy organization, Educate Maine administers four signature programs with key partners: Maine Teacher of the Year Program, Project>Login, Education Leaders Experience, and Maine Career Catalyst.