



For Immediate Release

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**FocusMaine Secures Transformative \$6.9 Million Challenge Grant
from Harold Alfond® Foundation**

AUGUSTA, Maine (January 11, 2024) — Today, FocusMaine proudly announces the receipt of a game-changing \$6.9 million, three-year challenge grant from the Harold Alfond® Foundation. This substantial investment marks a pivotal moment for FocusMaine, propelling its mission to strengthen and transform Maine's economy by expediting the growth of Maine's food economy and bioeconomy and building talent pathways to support a robust workforce.

“The Harold Alfond Foundation is proud to continue its support of FocusMaine, an organization with superb leadership, a strong network of partners, and building momentum and impact statewide,” said Gregory W. Powell, chairman of the Harold Alfond Foundation. “As it rolls out this next stage in its long-term strategy, we are confident that FocusMaine will drive the growth of even more quality jobs in Maine’s most globally competitive sectors.”

The grant will catalyze the organization's evolution, enabling the continued design and delivery of impactful programs with statewide partners that lead to increased economic prosperity for

Maine people. These crucial funds will fuel a comprehensive three-year strategic plan, ensuring the continuation of effective programs and a shift into more innovation and stakeholder engagement to strengthen Maine's food and bio economies. FocusMaine strategically drives economic development by designing, coordinating, and funding programs through leading organizations in Maine. These efforts focus on business and market development, attracting businesses, removing sector barriers, and enhancing workforce development.

This collaborative suite of services bolsters and grows existing food and bioscience businesses, attracts others to Maine and builds Maine's workforce. "We greatly appreciate the Harold Alfond Foundation's generous grant, enabling us to continue momentum in our sector-level economic development approach," said Andrea Cianchette Maker, Co-Founder and Co-Chair of FocusMaine, who recently stepped into the President role. "With our valued partner organizations, we are catalyzing jobs for tomorrow to replace the jobs of yesterday and developing the workforce for those jobs, helping to shape Maine's economy for future resilience and growth."

FocusMaine's earlier work has developed signature high-impact business and market development programming including the growth funding and technical assistance "Tastemakers" at Coastal Enterprises, Inc., accelerator programs "Cultivator," "MarketShare" and "Visionary Leadership" at Maine Center for Entrepreneurs, and business coaching, business tools, and communications at Maine Aquaculture Association. Thanks to the support of the Harold Alfond Foundation, all of these programs will continue to serve Maine businesses.

Partner organizations and companies alike express appreciation for the FocusMaine approach to growing Maine's economy. "Our food company-focused programming is effective and transformative," stated Tom Rainey, Executive Director of Maine Center for Entrepreneurs.

“Developing our programs with FocusMaine and its partners and getting the support to hire top talent to deliver those programs is enabling Maine food brands to catapult into national markets. We couldn’t be more excited to be able to continue these programs.”

“FocusMaine has been critical to our organization's ability to support the continued development of a sustainable Maine aquaculture sector,” said Sebastian Belle, Executive Director of the Maine Aquaculture Association (MAA). “With FocusMaine collaboration and support, MAA has designed and produced nationally recognized tools, benchmarking data, business coaching and workforce training that have strengthened Maine’s aquaculture industry and helped make Maine’s working waterfronts more resilient in the face of rapid social and ecological change.”

Overall, FocusMaine has fostered the growth of more than 180 Maine-based companies through these signature programs, including Maine Grains, 30 Acre Farm, Bixby Chocolates, Bang Island Mussels, American Unagi, Maine Crisp, Atlantic Sea Farms, Vena’s Fizz Bar and Mousam Valley Mushrooms to name just a few. These Maine brands are emerging onto the national scene. Zoë Croft, Director of Sales for Atlantic Sea Farms located in Biddeford, emphasized the impact of FocusMaine's programs, "With the support of FocusMaine and the Maine Center for Entrepreneurs, Atlantic Sea Farms has gained access to invaluable market data, industry trends, and analysis of our sales performance."

Amber Lambke, Co-founder and CEO of Maine Grains located in Skowhegan, echoed the sentiment. "Our participation in FocusMaine’s MarketShare program delivered by the Maine Center for Entrepreneurs has given Maine Grains access to seasoned industry professionals to help us with market research, contract negotiations, and building connections in the industry," she said.

FocusMaine has launched two signature workforce development programs in partnership with Educate Maine. Maine Career Catalyst, offers an internship enhancement program designed to increase young people's interest in pursuing a career in Maine. Aquaculture Pioneers, a pre-apprenticeship program, strengthens the industry by adding much-needed workforce capacity to small farms while providing a high-quality learning experience. Aquaculture Pioneers is Maine's first certified pre-apprenticeship program. Over 2,700 interns have completed the Maine Career Catalyst program, and 29 interns and pre-apprentices have completed the Aquaculture Pioneers program.

"Maine's ability to attract and retain young people--and ensure a vibrant economy--is lifted by the leadership of partners like FocusMaine," said Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine, which administers Maine Career Catalyst and Aquaculture Pioneers. "The lessons learned in these programs have an impact in other sectors and businesses, leveraging the power of the Harold Alfond Foundation donations across Maine."

The grant also allows FocusMaine to continue and add to innovative programs to grow Maine's blue economy with the New England Ocean Cluster and develop a robust Maine bioscience cluster with the University of Maine and the Roux Institute, working alongside Maine & Company, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute and other Maine institutions.

From 2017 through 2022, 5000 new jobs were created in Maine's food and bioscience sectors. Those sectors outpaced the overall economy for employment and establishment growth in Maine, according to Camoin Associate research data. In that time, the companies specifically served by FocusMaine programs added nearly 500 net new jobs, generating an additional \$170 million in sales revenue, \$46 million in earnings, and nearly 500 more jobs in related spin-off businesses. As FocusMaine reflects upon these achievements, the organization eagerly

anticipates continuing its efforts to convene, coordinate and engage a network of Maine resources to further bolster these numbers and support continued growth in the coming years.

About FocusMaine:

FocusMaine is a dynamic, data-driven, private sector-led initiative collaborating with influential leaders to accelerate the growth of high-potential industries, creating quality jobs and shaping a future-ready economy. Over the past five years, FocusMaine sectors' growth outpaced Maine's overall growth, and companies participating in FocusMaine programs catalyzed 468 net new jobs, generating an additional \$170 million in sales revenue, \$46 million in earnings, and 472 indirect and induced jobs.