

AMA Mariculture Liaisons - Monthly Regional Updates & Community Feedback

Reporting Period: August 2024

Liaison Highlights

Southeast Alaska; Keolani Booth and Brooke Leslie, Spruce Root

- *August updates to be provided during next reporting period*

Kodiak, Alaska; Lexa Meyer & Robbie Townsend Vennel, Kodiak Archipelago Leadership Institute

- Robbie and Lexa met with AFPC to discuss the inclusion of mariculture education-based activities for attendees of the AFPC meeting in Kodiak in March 2025. Lexa will attend and speak at the conference as well as host a hatchery tour for interested attendees.
- Lexa and Robbie are working with potential grant partners including Alaskan native farmers, KALI personnel and independent researchers to help develop, refine, and complete a project proposal under the Kelp Agricultural Product Development & Testing RFP.
- Lexa helped the Native Village of Ouzinkie/City of Ouzinkie complete a research permit with the state of Alaska for the site they are in the process of permitting for the Other Mariculture Species RFP.

Prince William Sound, Alaska; Sean Den Adel, Chugach Regional Resources Commission

- Sean continues to coordinate efforts with GreenWave, assisting with Prince William Sound's kelp farming cohort with training, market development, financial and technical support.
- Sean continues to assist with coordination between the Green Energy in Mariculture (GEM) project team and communication to Cordova's GEM project participants.
- Sean is supporting a proposal development for the Kelp Agricultural Product Development and Testing RFP with a local PWS tribe.

Kenai Peninsula, Alaska; Briana Murphy, Chugach Regional Resources Commission/Alutiiq Pride Marine Institute

- *No update available, liaison was on leave.*

Southwest, Alaska; Scott Prevatt, Qawalangin Tribe of Unalaska

- QTU's acting Liaison was on-boarded this past summer and spent time in the Aleutians where community and industry outreach was initiated in and around the communities of Unalaska and Dutch Harbor. Prevatt met with tribal elders, fishing industry representatives and fishing industry workers gauging interest and knowledge of mariculture opportunities.

Regional & Community Feedback

Excerpts taken directly from Liaison Monthly Reports

Prince William Sound

- Market price and volume are a common theme of discussion amongst kelp farmers. Farmers need to be able to make profitable margins to scale their operations and produce enough volume to access lower price point/higher volume markets.
- Market development for Alaskan kelp products is something I have heard farmers wanting to see more effort being put towards by the AMC and/or AMA.
- Capacity to pursue grant funding and/or affordable financing is an issue for PWS kelp farmers.

Kodiak Archipelago

- **Is SEC/AMC funding truly supporting mariculture in Alaska Native and rural communities?** We as liaisons have received no information in our liaison meetings as to what are the positive rural and Alaska Native impacts at this point in time. What percentage of funds have been spent to date in support of rural and Alaska Native farmers and communities and how does that compare to overall spending? Is the project reaching its rural and Alaska Native goals? We are unable to answer these questions when asked. We ask that SEC provide current information regarding who has benefitted from project spending to date so that we can respond to community member questions.
- **USACE Letter of Permission ESA Threatened/Endangered Species Mitigation Measures for Aquatic Farms:** As mariculture continues to expand in coastal Alaska it will be imperative that the industry collectively engage with regulators to develop solutions to these issues that work physically and financially for farmers. We requested assistance from the AMA to achieve greater understanding between regulators and farmers to develop regulations that support rather than hinder ecologically responsible mariculture development.
- **Consider using SEC/AMC monies to support regional rural and Alaska Native planning efforts.** KALI would like to discuss this further. It is critical that rural and Alaska Native communities and businesses be given the opportunity to come together in each region and plan how they see the mariculture space developing. And that the planning should be supported through a regional entity that works closely with the Alaska Native and rural community. Our experience is that expressed Alaska Native and rural community goals differ, sometimes substantively from those goals at the greater regional level.

Southwest Alaska (Aleutians)

- Common questions posed by Unalaska and Dutch Harbor residents and other interested parties are:
 - How could people make money from growing and selling kelp or shellfish?
 - What is the value considering the high cost of supplies and shipping?
 - Is this a fad, niche, boutique type market or is it a commodity to be sold in bulk?
- Fishing Industry Workers- Opportunistic meetings with multiple fishers and fishing vessel owners and operators. They have expressed interest in using their existing skills and equipment to fill gaps in revenue generation.
- A common concern of residents in Unalaska and Dutch Harbor is water quality, specifically the status of red tide and paralytic shellfish poisoning. People generally do not think it is safe to harvest shellfish from the nearshore waters in and around Unalaska and Dutch Harbor. People also think there is too much kelp in the near shore waters, more kelp is present in recent years. It was mentioned that there are more sea otters and less sea urchins now than in the past.
- Mariculture site selection and permitting was identified as a potential challenge to any ne operator. Bays and coves in and around the communities of Unalaska and Dutch Harbor are subject high wind and wave action, vessel traffic, subsistence food harvesting, and other commercial and recreational activities.

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Kenai Peninsula

- Large focus on engaging youth in mariculture activities and traditional subsistence practices.

Southeast Alaska

- Recently, there has been significant interest in geoduck and oyster farming. There's enthusiasm for establishing diverse shellfish and kelp farms, both as a backup plan and to enhance personal knowledge of various sellable products, whether food grade or not.

Prince William Sound

- Cordova/Eyak community members seem supportive but simultaneously apprehensive about the kelp farming industry. More fishermen are seeking to diversify their income streams following a difficult seine season in PWS, but many also worry about the lack of processing equipment/infrastructure and markets for local kelp farmers. Due to lack of secure market opportunities, most people that I have spoken with are not ready to invest their own time and money into this industry.
- Kelp farmers are actively seeking funding opportunities to operate and expand their farming operations. One farmer asked if the USDA would be reissuing the Value-Added Producer Grant, it is on my list of things to investigate.

Kodiak Archipelago

- **Regional concerns expressed regarding rollout of revolving loan fund.** Specifically, timing in that can kelp farmers afford to apply for a revolving loan fund without markets and therefore income streams from harvesting kelp to pay back the loans? Again, for the few qualifying Alaska Native and rural farms, it would have been helpful if this program rolled out parallel to the AMA matching grant program. We anticipate another round of matching grants being announced shortly and would like to know the details and qualifications required ASAP so we can get this info out to community members. KALI anticipates needing to provide interested community members with direct support in applying.
- **USACE Letter of Permission ESA Threatened/Endangered Species Mitigation Measures for Aquatic Farms:** Due to the necessity of needing a USACE permit to operate a farm in navigable waters, including state waters (0-3 mi), farms must engage with the NMFS regarding threatened and endangered species. This usually involves a section 7 informal Endangered Species Act (ESA)

consultation with the NMFS Habitat Protection Office. Recent USACE permit applications have been receiving pushback from NMFS regarding the following:

- Sunflower Sea Stars (SSS) will at some point be listed as threatened under the ESA. The NMFS habitat protection biologist was requiring dive or ROV surveys prior to gear installation such as anchors to ensure that no sea stars were harmed. This is time consuming and expensive for farmers, it would be better to have a “take” issued for the industry, similar to what has been done for commercial fisheries, so that farmers can deploy gear without expensive mitigation measures. Alicia Bishop with NOAA said this is a real possibility and probably the best route for the industry, we need to see that this gets done. Commercial fisheries have lobbyists and policy specialists that have helped get these “takes” allocated, kelp farmers don’t.
- Almost all coastal waters in Alaska are home to marine mammals, many listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA. NMFS is recommending on new USACE permits that farmers use weak links in their farming systems to prevent possible marine mammal entanglements. While these weak links work on the horizontal cultivation lines of a catenary array system they will not work on anchor lines as forces greater than the breaking strength of the weak links are needed to hold large farm systems in place. It seems that the NMFS have a general lack of understanding of farm systems and I think they need a third party to educate them. NMFS is also pushing back on keeping anchors and associated buoy lines in the water, year round. Removal of 10 or more anchors annually is a huge cost to farmers and may particularly hurt smaller farm operations that have to pay for a larger vessel to assist with anchor placement and removal.
- The NMFS is requiring that all farms submit an annual report to NMFS by the end of January annually summarizing each time the farm was visited by the farmer or crew, when gear was deployed, when gear was removed, when kelp is harvested, and if there were any endangered, threatened or generally any marine mammals in or around the site. While farmers may not mind submitting data in an online form regarding marine mammal or EAS listed species in and around the farms, the other information is private and perhaps even proprietary. NMFS has no plan as to how the information will remain confidential, how it will be used, nor is there any format or template for a report. Farmers already report harvest and sale information to the State of Alaska annually, the state does not ask for this level of information. There is also no precedence for this level of oversight and reporting for any state managed fisheries in Alaska. Kelp and seaweed resources from 0-3mi are under the management oversight of the state of Alaska.
- Overall, KALI has reached the limit as to how much we can engage with NMFS regarding these issues, it is taking up a disproportionate amount of time and these are issues that

impact the entire industry. As mariculture continues to expand in coastal Alaska it will be imperative that the industry collectively engage with regulators to develop solutions to these issues that work physically and financially for farmers. We request assistance from the AMA to achieve greater understanding between regulators and farmers to develop regulations that support rather than hinder ecologically responsible mariculture development.

- **Provide an efficient mechanism for feedback from the liaisons and their constituency. How do we give feedback and how does this feedback become integrated for any needed changes?**

Southwest Alaska (Aleutians)

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