

AMA Mariculture Liaisons - Community Feedback

Major Themes Compiled from Reporting Period of October 2023 - July 2024

- **Mariculture Incentive Grant Program**
 - Excluding non-profits from MIGP application eligibility excludes many Native and Tribal entities.
 - No applications from rural Alaska Native or community farms in the Kodiak Archipelago because of eligibility criteria (Non-profit exclusion)
 - Reimbursement-basis is a major barrier for rural and Alaska Native applicants.

- **Grant/Loan Programs**
 - Shellfish farmers expressed reservations about access to funding under BBB, with funding going to the kelp farmers without the industry standing up on its own.
 - Other RFLs and grants programs not initiated parallel to the AMA matching grant program excludes potential applications.
 - Consulting with tribal councils, community members, and tribal corporations, and soliciting input on potential projects and partnerships to respond to current BBB RFPs is not feasible in the timeline provided. (Kenai)
 - We are finding that we are receiving very limited information prior to proposal rollout and then once the RPF is released there is a very small time frame in which to respond. This reduces the opportunity to work particularly with rural leadership to support full participation [Kodiak]
 - Many fisherman and Tribal leaders in the Southern Southeast have a negative perception of kelp and Mariculture funds roll out and coordination. It is clear that more information and engagement needs to happen in POW, Metlakatla, Ketchikan to work on showing the positive benefits of mariculture.

- **Product Processing**
 - Lack of processing capacity and infrastructure is limiting the growth and viability of the kelp farming industry (PWS)
 - Lack of access to in-person food safety and handling training.

- **Native and Tribal Entities**
 - Tribes are not stakeholders; they are sovereign entities and should not be referred to as Stakeholders.
 - This should not be another extractive industry where tribes & communities are left behind.
 - Several of the regional villages have been dealing with major transition in the structure/composition of their Tribal Governments/Administrations/Councils and are

unsure of how much capacity they can put towards mariculture development at this time (PWS).

- In SE Alaska, it is clear that there are many shared issues with workforce development and a negative perception of kelp and mariculture development due to a possible large corporation engagement with private parties and the lack of an overall plan for the area that tribal leaderships know of.
 - The barriers for entry in the existing funding available leaves underserved and Alaska Natives at a disadvantage.
 - Tribal members from Chugach regions are interested in learning more about kelp mariculture but are significantly more interested in enhancement projects for clams and bidarkis.
- Markets
 - “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?” (KALI)
 - Lack of definitive markets
 - There is a lack of information and examples of financial forecasting for mariculture businesses. What are the total start up costs? What revenue can individuals expect?
 - Shellfish farmers expressed reservations about mariculture being incorporated into ASMI’s marketing umbrella.
 - Mariculture Communication
 - There is a desire for more SE Alaska Mariculture virtual recurring meetings, and a need for more people to show up to the meetings and conferences that are being held.
 - Provide an efficient mechanism for feedback from the liaisons and their constituency. How does this feedback become integrated for any needed changes?
 - There is a need for well coordinated in-person meetings with folks to correctly assess the actual aspirations of Southeast Coastal Communities.
 - Leasing / Permits
 - There are growing concerns about the amount of coastal space being leased for kelp farms that remain inactive (after receiving permits for aquatic farm leases).
 - The overhead costs for leases and insurances continue to increase annually. This leads to reduced chances of viability for small mariculture farms.
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- Many questions during this reporting period have revolved around the aquatic farm permitting process, regulatory agency engagement with Tribal governments during the permitting process, and economics surrounding kelp farming.
- Concerns with permitting timing and issuance due to the new ESA listing of sunflower sea star. Residents of the Kodiak Archipelago are concerned with the duration and possible barriers to permitting that the new ESA regulations will have on the mariculture industry and commercial fishing.
- Industry Cooperation & Development
 - Existing permit holders possibly open to partnerships to grow capacity but also get those partners to apply for permits as well.
 - Overall it seems there is a sense that the industry is attainable for folks after realizing there are funds and groups dedicated to helping Alaska residents build up the economy through mariculture. The interest in the kelp and mariculture field from tradesman and also the salmon fishing and net building community was an unexpected but very fruitful conversation.
 - Kodiak communities are now considering oyster development as a more likely pathway to growing rural opportunity. This concern is reflected in the decline of interest in kelp related training opportunities.
 - Valdez is eager to participate in the mariculture industry and there are several people interested in starting an oyster farm. The City of Valdez is a strong supporter of economic development in the region and sees mariculture as an opportunity for the community.
 - Cordova's kelp farmers and non-profit organizations have been meeting and communicating more frequently with one another and collaborative efforts to procure and operate kelp processing equipment are in the early stages of development.
 - There is a growing interest in pursuing organic certification for kelp crops.
- New Entry Activity
 - Barriers to entry discouragement noted to be due to very high upfront costs and lack of good available data on market entry
 - While in and around Southeast communities for tribal leadership meetings, it was clear that there were many shared issues with workforce development and a negative perception of kelp and mariculture development due to a possible large corporation engagement with private parties and the lack of an overall plan for the area that they know of.
 - General lack of knowledge of mariculture, and what that the different industry roles and activities look like in real time.
 - Many interested fishermen in the PWS region have not applied for aquatic farm permits because they have yet to see existing farmers develop profitable businesses.

- Cordova's kelp farming cohort is collectively interested in pursuing organic certification for their kelp crops.
- High interest in shellfish enhancement projects from CRRC communities and concern about shellfish stocks and sea otter predation of traditional harvest and subsistence areas.
- There is low commitment from several regional fishers due to a lack of local profitable businesses to prove viability.