

**“Has the LPA system been successful?
Small-scale marine aquaculture recruitment in Maine through the
limited-purpose aquaculture (‘LPA’) licensing system”**

Research period: 2020-2022
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Executive Summary of Research Findings

- Efforts to support LPA applicants and LPA-holders have created a boom of successful small-scale ocean farmers that appears to be spread relatively evenly throughout Maine’s coastal counties
- Commercialization is the primary vehicle for viability at the LPA level
- Private aquaculture training programs likely have produced a high proportion of successful LPA-holders
- Less than 40% of LPA-holders worked in seafood industries prior to mariculture, particularly lobstering; marine aquaculture in Maine today is driven by relatively new entrants
- The LPA system has equipped LPA-holders to make informed decisions about whether to expand their operations

What are LPA farmers harvesting?

Oysters are the predominant species on Maine farms, accounting for 84% of the species that respondents indicated they regularly harvest. Seaweed (15%) and scallops (9%) rank a distant second and third. Many farms are permitted to grow multiple species, but most farms are betting on oyster productivity and/or revenue.

What are LPA-holders’ backgrounds?

Most (61%) of respondents did not work in the seafood industry before starting in aquaculture. Of those who did work in seafood, one-third are/were in lobstering and one-third are/were in groundfishing.

Two-thirds of respondents have lived in the state for more than 20 years. However, most respondents have worked in aquaculture and been farming their LPAs for only 3 - 5 years. Aquaculture in Maine has boomed since the mid-2010s.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents participated in an aquaculture training program. Considering that there are only two such programs in Maine (the Island Institute’s Aquaculture Business Development program and Sea Grant’s Aquaculture in Shared Waters), it is likely that this in-state training propelled the majority of successful LPA users.

Why do farmers choose an LPA?

Nearly half of respondents use their LPA(s) for income; 33% for secondary income, and 16% for primary income. Food accounts for 17% of LPA use, with 4.6% of such users indicating that they would be food-insecure if they suddenly couldn’t eat their LPA product(s). 16% of LPA-holders use their LPA(s) for recreation.

Reported reasons for obtaining an LPA vary but indicate that **many users desire more complex operations than those allowed by LPA rules.** While only 21% of respondents have an LPA because it is “the right size” for their farm, 28% have an LPA because it was the easiest aquaculture permit/lease to obtain, 22% to experiment with new growing techniques or new species, and 12% for temporary grow-out space; perhaps as much as 61% of LPA users are discontent with the size of their LPA farm.

While 65% of respondents operate only one or more LPAs, **58% want to expand their farm, with the majority (59%) of such users want to obtain a Standard Lease.** The vast majority (85%) of users reported that the LPA system has given them the experience to make an informed decision about whether or not to expand their farm.

Commercial LPA operations

Two-thirds of respondents sell their LPA product(s), and one-third of those not currently selling their LPA product(s) want to sell them. Nearly three-quarters are certified shellfish dealers (a requirement for selling to restaurants and dealers), and 71% of users who are not currently certified wish to become so.

Roughly one-third of users earned less than \$5,000 a year before the pandemic; only about 10% earned more than \$30,000.