

Mariculture Workforce Development Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

November 18, 2016

Attendees: Paula Cullenberg (Alaska Sea Grant), John Kiser (Rocky Bay Oysters), Jim Aguiar (Eagle Shellfish Farm), Myrna Gardner (CCTHITA), Eric Wyatt (Blue Starr Oyster), Adam Smith and Christi Colles, DNR and Barbara Brown, DOLWD

Introduction:

- Welcome to new members, John and Jim and guests, Adam, Christi and Barbara.

Discussion:

Reviewed the goals discussed on last month's call:

- **Goals for Mariculture Workforce Development for aquatic farms, hatchery and nursery operations:**
 - Increase profits and business success for those already in the industry;
 - Ensure hatcheries and nurseries and farms have skilled workforce to draw from;
 - Inform, recruit and retain new entry into industry.

The rest of the discussion focused on the potential for an apprenticeship program. John Kiser's vision would be to house an apprentice at his farm for the summer and then next summer give the apprentice 100,000 seed to begin their own operation, next year begin application for a farm, 3rd year build rafts and 4th year, establish their own farm. John could take up to 2 apprentices.

Jim Aguiar has lost a lot of oysters due to lack of labor to work at the farm. Jim's vision is to have a summer apprentice on his farm, which is larger than John's. He generally hires two employees. It would be a help if the salary for an apprentice could be covered somehow, especially since they would be inexperienced. He could potentially take up to 2 apprentices in a summer.

One concept discussed was an apprentice spending 2 weeks on Jim's farm and 2 weeks on John's farm and then have the apprentice choose an operation for the rest of the summer.

Adam Smith noted that DNR has seen a lot of failed farms which the state needs to clean up. The state is supportive of any way to increase the success of farms. Maybe an apprenticeship

“stamp” could contribute to the permit process. John Kiser noted that the Farm Service Administration felt that a completed apprenticeship could make it easier for an FSA loan.

Barbara Brown with the Dept of Labor and Workforce Development and an apprenticeship expert noted that apprentices begin at some % of a journey level wage and move up in 1,000 hour increments. For example, they year 60%, 70%, 80% and 90% of journey level salaries for each level. There is also some book learning, formal or informal training required for an apprentice. She noted that the shellfish farming apprenticeship discussion is more entrepreneurial focused rather than an employer-employee relationship so may not fit the DOLWD apprenticeship format.

Myrna Gardner noted that the tribal workforce funds could be used to support workforce development and an apprenticeship with more flexibility than the DOLWD programs. The program could incentivize the completion by say, purchasing start up gear.

Maybe a person could try it out for 90 days and then decide if they want to continue.

John Kiser has also looked into programs that could incentivize vets to participate. Barbara says that is in partnership with DOLWD.

The group noted that John Kiser was scheduled to talk about this at the ASGA meeting next month in Anchorage.

Note: pay range is minimum wage or a bit more plus room and board. Work available for 7-8 months per year.

Action items:

Barbara Brown will outline what is needed to develop a program that encourages vets.

Myrna will outline what she needs to get an apprenticeship launched.

John will talk about apprenticeships and get input from farmers at the ASGA meeting December 8 and 9 in Anchorage.

Next meeting will be set after the ASGA meeting.

Governor’s Alaska Mariculture Task Force: On Feb. 26, 2016, Governor Walker established the Alaska Mariculture Task Force with the directive to develop a viable and sustainable mariculture industry producing shellfish and aquatic plants for the long-term benefit of Alaska’s economy, environment, and communities. The Task Force members were appointed in May and the Task Force will present its recommendations on March 1, 2018.

Vision: Provide direction for development of a viable and productive industry *Alaska’s mariculture industry could grow to \$1 billion in thirty years with an industry-led, coordinated effort, utilizing public-private partnerships, and a statewide comprehensive plan designed to reach this goal.* This vision is attainable given the existing significant scale and impact of Alaska’s seafood industry. In 2014, the total economic output of Alaska’s seafood industry was approximately \$6 billion, including 60,000 jobs. Alaska produces more seafood than the rest of the U.S., and if Alaska were a country, it would be in the top 10 for seafood production. Alaska maintains a global reputation for sustainably managed fishery resources, and has over 35,000 miles of coastline. Examples of other geographic regions with smaller shorelines yet significant annual mariculture production are British Columbia (\$33 M), Washington (\$110 M), New Zealand (\$400 M), and Norway (\$5 B).

Mariculture Defined: In Alaska, mariculture is *wild fishery enhancement, farming, and restoration of shellfish and aquatic plants*. Finfish farming is not allowed under state law and will not be pursued as a part of this initiative.

Benefits to Alaskans: The development of the mariculture industry in the state will provide the following benefits to Alaskans: 1) economic - providing jobs and commerce in coastal communities; 2) environmental - improving the local ecosystem in various ways, such as habitat improvement, carbon removal, or countering ocean acidification; 3) cultural - compatible with traditions, cultures, and skills in rural communities; 4) industrial - complements and expands our existing renewable seafood industry, which is Alaska’s largest private sector employer; 5) food security - increasing access to local foods for Alaskans.

Coordination with communities and industry: The development of an *Alaska Mariculture Industry* will integrate with the following initiatives and policies:

- ***Alaska Mariculture Initiative undertaken by the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation*** Since 1978, AFDF has been dedicated to identifying problems common to the Alaska seafood industry and developing efficient, sustainable solutions that provide benefits to the economy, environment and communities. Successes include research

and development preceding the whitefish industry in SW Alaska, fish oil research, and development of other value-added products. In 2014, AFDF began spearheading this initiative with the intention of expediting the development of the mariculture industry.

- **National Shellfish Initiative** launched by NOAA Fisheries' Office of Aquaculture in 2011 aimed at increasing the populations of bivalve shellfish through commercial production and restoration;
- **NOAA's Marine Aquaculture Strategic Plan 2016-2020** which specifically directs NOAA to "**coordinate with partners to support Alaska Shellfish Initiative**";
- **USDA Investment Strategy in Support of Rural Communities in SE Alaska 2011-2013** which identifies mariculture development as worthy of further USDA investment;
- **National Strategic Plan for Federal Aquaculture Research** (2014-2019) is an interagency strategic plan to guide Federal research in aquaculture.

Challenges

- Investment & Infrastructure – hatchery seed production, growth techniques, product development require initial investment
- Organizational capacity - new & emerging industry needs to develop capacity & coordination to address challenges
- Workforce - workforce requires recruitment, training, development
- Regulatory hurdles - perceived competing uses for sites & perceived environmental issues
- Remote areas - extremely remote sites which increase costs & logistics
- Environmental issues - sea otter predation & ocean acidification

Target Partners