MAKING AN IMPACT:

MAINE INSTITUTIONS PURCHASING UNDERLOVED SEAFOOD

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI) pioneers collaborative solutions to global ocean challenges. Located in Portland, ME, GMRI is dedicated to the resilience of the Gulf of Maine ecosystem and the communities that depend on it.

GMRI’s seafood program has a mission to strengthen both the ecological and economic sustainability of the Gulf of Maine seafood industry. In 2011, GMRI created the Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® ecolabel to empower consumers to buy seafood they can feel good about. Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested seafood is traceable to the Gulf of Maine region and meets important criteria around responsible harvest. It’s a promise that the product hails from the clean, productive waters of the Gulf of Maine, and that the fishery is managed in a way that contributes to the long-term health of the resource. GMRI is proud to work with industry leaders across the seafood supply chain to build market demand and to give consumers opportunities to choose Gulf of Maine seafood.

THE MAINE COURSE GOALS

- Increase purchasing of local Maine grown, harvested, and produced products.
- Grow partnerships with our local community.
- Develop shared values and bring awareness of Maine products and sustainable practices to our customers in all dining locations.
- Provide Sodexo chefs and managers with the resources they need to expand their local impact.

MAINE SODEXO CLIENT LIST

Southern Maine Community College
Maine Maritime Academy
University of Maine at Presque Isle
University of Maine at Fort Kent

Thomas College
York County Community College
University of Southern Maine
University of Maine at Machias

Maine College of Art
Central Maine Health Care Center
University of Maine at Farmington
University of Maine at Augusta

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A Commitment to 100%

In 2015 Sodexo made a commitment and a goal to source more Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® seafood for the locations they serve in Maine. Over the last five years, Sodexo staff across 12 institutions in the state have worked hard to achieve the milestone of purchasing 100% Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® fresh white fish. Specifically, Sodexo commits:

- To work with the supply chain in the Gulf of Maine region, including processors and fishermen, to build capacity to harvest, process and serve underutilized species, like dogfish, Atlantic mackerel, Atlantic pollock, Acadian redfish and white hake.
- To educate Sodexo customers in Maine about the region’s fishing and seafood industry, via the Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested program.

Why does this commitment matter?

We import 90% of the seafood that we eat in the U.S. Even in Maine, great effort is often required for a large purchaser to buy local seafood. Sodexo’s commitment to local seafood has multiple impacts:

- ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT: The local white fish served are all Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested®, which is an eco-label of the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI), ensuring responsible harvest.
- COMMUNITY IMPACT: Fishermen catching haddock, pollock, and other flaky, white fish from our region have a tough time competing with imported seafood. Sodexo makes a difference by using our buying power to prioritize local fishing communities.
- EDUCATIONAL IMPACT: Underloved fish are those that consumers are less familiar with, which leads to low prices and lost opportunity for fishermen. Sodexo has been focused on raising awareness of underloved seafood among a younger generation of consumers.

Choosing a wider variety of fish is good for fishermen, good for the ecosystem, and good for our own health.

Impact on Campuses

Sodexo strives to educate campus communities about our local seafood efforts. We know there is great demand for local food across the campuses we serve, and we believe seafood is an often-overlooked solution to local food demand. A collaboration between Sodexo, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, and University of Southern Maine’s Food Studies faculty member, Dr. Jamie Picardy, has significant impact on student consumption.

$234,003.18 spent on local fresh white fish Responsibly Harvested® from the Gulf of Maine in the last 5 years

Impact on Communities

We at Sodexo are committed to using our buying power to have a broader impact on the communities where we work. We have built awareness with thousands of students on the wide range of seafood available from the Gulf of Maine. These efforts to build demand give fishermen more opportunities to catch a wider range of the fish available to them. Since Sodexo’s commitment began in 2015, landings in New England (the number of pounds caught by fishermen) are on an upward trend for key underloved species that Sodexo has focused on buying: Atlantic pollock, Acadian redfish, and white hake.

In addition to directly increasing demand for Gulf of Maine seafood with its purchases, Sodexo has also demonstrated to other buyers in the marketplace that shifting to local seafood is feasible and that it makes good business sense. GMRI has leveraged Sodexo’s innovative regional seafood commitment to inspire other buyers to make goals around local seafood sourcing, amplifying the long-term impact of Sodexo’s commitment.

First of its kind: Shark Bites

When Sodexo first made the commitment to source more Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® seafood, GMRI seafood program manager Kyle Foley remembers, “Varun Avasthi (Sodexo District Manager) kept asking where they could have the biggest impact, and we told him that if Sodexo wanted to do something unique, he should try to build demand for dogfish.” Dogfish, or cape shark, is a small shark species that is enormously abundant in the Gulf of Maine region. Yet, due to lack of consumer awareness, fishermen are paid very little for it. At an event to raise the profile of dogfish, fisherman Doug Feeney said, “We have an underutilized fish that I believe is the future. We have this one that is enormously abundant in the Gulf of Maine region. Yet, due to lack of consumer awareness, fishermen are paid very little for it.”

GMRI reports that at least two other major buyers in the region have been inspired to explore value-added dogfish products since Sodexo introduced shark bites. 

Sustaining Our Commitment

As we look ahead to sustaining our commitment and impact on the local food economy and the Gulf of Maine, Sodexo commits to:

- Maintain serving 100% Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® fresh white fish.
- Increase overall local seafood purchases.
- Increase purchasing of Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® frozen white fish.

Sodexo’s goal is to increase awareness, consumption and purchase of local seafood through a series of presentations and events held across the 12 institutions in the state. By 2020, we hope to achieve the milestone of 51% of students enrolled in Maine colleges are Sodexo accounts and are being served Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested® seafood.