COLLABORATION for Sustainability and Economic Impact
THE MAINE COURSE

When we understand how economic and environmental issues impact our communities, we often make better choices – when we know better, we do better. The challenges faced by communities within Maine regarding energy supplies, fisheries, forestry and tourism are personal to many folks. In Maine and elsewhere, effective sustainability solutions depend on collaboration and vision.

Our Sodexo teams partner with our clients to understand local issues and achieve shared goals; along the way, we nurture quality of life and prosperity. Maine is a gem – rocky, gorgeous coastlines, heavily forested interior regions, stunning lake vistas, and vibrant arts and city life. The Maine Course is our commitment to make a positive economic impact in the State of Maine through the purchase of local products, produce, services and responsibly harvested underutilized seafood from the Gulf of Maine. Daily menus and educational programming grow nourished, inspired and empowered consumers. Additionally, we forge networks of local farmers, fisher people, and business owners to campus sites to highlight local Maine products.

The Maine Course works as a nexus of intent, action and measurable results. Stakeholders share values and create lasting awareness of Maine products and sustainable practices. This work is especially impactful because we involve students, fostering a lifetime of thoughtful consumerism.

From Fishing Nets to NETWORKING

Overfishing is a global threat. When the pace of fishing and seafood harvesting occurs faster than replenishment, species become underpopulated. Overfishing can also include commercial fishing operations that haul in unwanted species, which are then discarded. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the number of overfished stocks globally has tripled in half a century. Today, one-third of the world’s fisheries are pushed beyond their biological limits.

In 2012, the U.S. Commerce Department issued a formal disaster declaration for the Northeastern commercial groundfish fishery, which includes the Gulf of Maine. Cod, a critical commercial species, were not rebounding as quickly as predicted due to both climate change and overfishing. Regulators began to limit cod fishing in the Gulf of Maine. Allowable limits decreased drastically, from 8,000 metric tons annually to 637 metric tons in 2019. While these rules may decrease the effects of overfishing, they can devastate the economic prosperity, stability, and well-being of fishing communities.

Sustainable solutions do not require picking a side: the health of the Gulf of Maine vs. the economic health of the region. Sodexo, in partnership with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute (GMRI), seized this opportunity for our campus and healthcare clients in Maine. Most New England seafood customers prefer well-known species such as cod and haddock. However, our partnership demonstrates that when we align education, purchasing, marketing and menu design, that we can generate demand for abundant, but “under loved” species such as pollock, silver hake, spiny dogfish and Atlantic mackerel. Our teams are excited by the trend of consumer preference shifts from overfished, popular seafood to more sustainable and locally abundant choices.
The United States is the top importer of seafood in the world. With nearly 95,000 miles of shoreline, how can we focus on local fish and shellfish harvesting?

(Source: U.S. Department of Commerce; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

Dogfish are a great example. Haven’t heard of spiny dogfish before? You are not alone. As cod became overfished and its stock closely monitored, fishermen in the Gulf of Maine are no longer overlooking dogfish, which are one of the most abundant fish (well, they are actually sharks!) on the East coast. With U.S. consumers still preferring overfished species such as tuna and salmon, over 90% of dogfish caught in New England are exported to the UK and other parts of Europe, where they are often on the menu as the golden battered fish that accompanies chips in restaurants and pubs. While it’s good that Maine fishermen can find a market for their dogfish in Europe, the Sodexo Maine Course team set out to build the market among university and health care clients.

Kyle Foley is the Senior Program Manager of the Sustainable Seafood program at GMRI. Through the partnership with Sodexo, she develops and implements strategies to strengthen both the ecological and economic sustainability of the Gulf of Maine – in short, her role helps customers find and buy underutilized Gulf of Maine seafood. It’s only natural to build that market demand through university communities. Students are often eager to explore new foods, and sustainability lessons align with classroom learning. When they can link their food and classwork to the environment and local economy, these students gain lifelong knowledge and interest in preserving ecosystems and the livelihood of fisher people.

Sodexo banked on using the tastebuds to change hearts and minds! Our teams made the bold commitment that 100% of the fresh white fish used at any Maine client sites would be Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested by 2020. Sodexo uses data to drive our Maine Course work. A key example: before menu design, the University of Southern Maine (USM) Sodexo team surveyed students about their seafood interests and knowledge in partnership with a USM Food Studies class.
More than 50% of respondents indicated they would eat tuna, salmon or shrimp, while less than 8% would eat dogfish, pollock or redfish.

Despite those perceptions, the Sodexo team implemented marketing and menus designed to drive interest, engagement and excitement around more sustainable choices. New signage explained sustainability commitments and generated excitement around the menu changes. Just two years later, the Sodexo Maine Course team across university sites achieved that 100% goal!

Partnerships thrive because of these commitments to local sourcing and local innovation. Through GMRI, Maine Course partnered with sustainable seafood wholesaler Maine Shellfish to create Shark Bites, a breaded product, similar to fish nuggets, made with dogfish.

GRAIN GOALS

The grain economy in Maine is growing! While many folks naturally look toward the Gulf when they consider going local in Maine, there are substantial plant-based products, including grains, that are integral to the Maine food system.

Sodexo’s Maine Course is aligned with USM’s commitment to sourcing products within 175 miles of campus. Why? To ensure that income, jobs and reinvestment stay within the community. Currently, about 25% of the food purchased for University of Maine system campuses meets the local definition.

Maine Grain sells its products from Maine to New York City. But, close to home—locally—our Sodexo teams use oats, flour, farro and other ancient grains, wheat flour and rye berries that are grown in Maine and stone milled in the production facility in Skowhegan. Students get fresh-baked cookies and baked goods infused with flours and whole grains sourced and milled near campus. In the mid-19th century, the economy of Somerset County grew significantly because of grain production, but that ended with consolidation of local farms in the 1950s. Sodexo’s partnership with the Maine Grain Alliance is a significant investment in bringing back Maine’s grain economy. Along the way, our collaboration creates economic opportunities for people, provides long-lasting sustainability for family-owned farms and protects the land from harmful agricultural practices.

As students enjoy their morning oatmeal or a tabbouleh salad, made with Maine-grown farro, they are helping the economic and environmental future of the region. They are also helping our partnership reach our goals of (1) doubling the number of menu items that include grains, (2) using local grains in those dishes and (3) increasing local grain purchasing by 50%.
EXTENDING SMALL BUSINESS ROOTS

The Maine Course reflects deep commitments to sustainability. With the health of people, the environment and the local economy as the foundation of our shared goals, our partnerships also reflect fun and joy. Our Sodexo teams value the chance to share amazing products and tremendous entrepreneurs with students, ensuring they understand the value of investing locally.

- **Rockland Maine’s very own Bixby & Company**, founded by Kate MacAleer, fills a key niche – delicious, sustainably produced and responsibly-sourced confectionaries. This woman-owned business delivers real change in the candy-industry with organic, non-GMO sweets that contain local ingredients like wild Maine blueberries and Maine sea salt. Bixby & Co. chocolates are favorites on campuses throughout the University of Maine system.

> The mission of Maine Course is outstanding; it is important for Maine producers and consumers to support local businesses to make Maine better.”
> - Kate MacAleer, Bixby & Company

- Local flavors and local people drive our work and are reflected in the perseverance and passion of our partners. **Papou’s Kitchen** is a family-owned and operated business founded in 2008 by Chris and Niki Zoulamis. Papou’s Kitchen has grown from distribution in Portland, Maine to becoming the leading producer and distributor of falafel in New England, driven, in part, from the interest in healthier, vegetarian dishes at the university sites Sodexo serves.
Resolving food insecurity, particularly among children, and preventing food waste are interdependent goals. Sodexo has long strived to ensure people have access to sufficient healthy food every day so they can thrive. Sodexo launched our Stop Hunger initiative in 1996, and in 1999 founded Sodexo Stop Hunger, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring every child in the United States grows up with dependable access to enough nutritious food to enable them to lead a healthy, productive life.

In Maine, these goals complement Maine Course at client sites. At USM, Sodexo is a member of the Food Security Coalition, a collaboration of campus partners and student organizations working to create a community without hunger or food waste. There have been a number of impactful campus changes, including a food cooler that is stocked with excess food from the dining hall each night.

The innovation grew because of local partnerships and local commitments – the heart of Maine Course. Sodexo was a co-recipient of the Food Vision Prize by the Henry P. Kendall Foundation. The Maine University Team, led by food service provider Sodexo and in partnership with the Good Shepherd Food Bank and Maine-based food producer Jasper Wyman & Son (Wyman’s), developed a vegetable freezer facility in Maine, which represents a first-in-the-area opportunity to meet the demand for locally processed product at a price the local market can afford. The facility will sell products into the institutional market and provide product through hunger relief channels, capitalizing on the Food Bank’s existing network as well as distribution routes to the K-12 market.

“We are excited by the possibilities and the opportunity to expand access to Maine-grown products throughout the year.”

– Kristen Miale, president of Good Shepherd Food Bank

The New England Food Vision Prize is emblematic of the trajectory of the Maine Course—from supporting healthy food for all, sustainable farming and fishing, and thriving communities. Sodexo’s investments matter in Maine. In 2021, Sodexo will purchase $1 million worth of local food through our 130-plus local partnerships with farms, food producers and fisheries.
Complex issues require collaboration. Maine Course has succeeded because everyone—farmers, fisher people, entrepreneurs, chefs, and non-profit leaders—always have seats at the table. Our best work happens together. I am proud of our shared commitments to sustainability, economic prosperity, small business, and to the health of communities across Maine. We are excited to see where Maine Course collaboration will bring us next!”

– MAEVE MCINNIS - MAINE COURSE DIRECTOR