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Media Contact: Josiah Petrin

[josiahp@broadreachpr.com](mailto:josiahp@broadreachpr.com)

207.423.7343



**North American Local Catch Network Awarded \$500,000 USDA Grant to Catalyze “Boat-to-Fork” Seafood Marketing in the United States** *Funding will create first nationwide accelerator to train and support seafood producers in marketing their catch directly to consumers*

**ORONO, Maine** (December 18, 2020) – The [Local Catch Network](#), based in the School of Marine Sciences at the University of Maine, has received a half-million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) to support better integration of seafood into local and regional food systems and fund the creation of ‘Scale Your Local Catch,’ the first nationwide training and technical assistance program to catalyze sustainable direct-to-consumer seafood operations.

The Local Catch Network has raised \$624,331 for the project, which included a 25% percent match contribution from the University of Maine System on top of the \$499,463 grant awarded by the USDA. With funding secured, the Local Catch Network is now in the beginning stages of building out the Scale Your Local Catch program’s infrastructure and expects to start recruiting its first cohort this summer. To start, the program will prioritize seafood operations that serve consumers in low income and low food access areas.

Joshua Stoll, Assistant Professor of Marine Policy at the University of Maine and co founder of the Local Catch Network, explained the significance of the project:

“We are thrilled that the Local Catch Network is receiving this incredibly important and timely grant. As we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, and repeatedly in recent history, fishers and seafood harvesters are vulnerable to social, environmental, and economic shocks. Direct and values-based seafood businesses have been a bright spot, stepping up during the pandemic when traditional supply chains have faltered. This grant will help to ensure that these alternative business models remain sustainable long-term and seafood is recognized as an integral part of local and regional food systems.”

A broad range of skills, from marketing and social media management to pricing and permitting, are required to successfully sell seafood directly to consumers. Scale Your Local Catch will reduce the learning curve for fishing communities by leveraging the collective experience of the Local Catch Network and partnering organizations through workshops, networking and mentorship opportunities, and digital tools, such as a next

generation [Seafood Finder](#) designed to link consumers with producers in their local area. Scale Your Local Catch is being modeled after 'Ag of the Middle,' a well-established training program for small and mid-sized agricultural businesses facilitated by the Oregon based non-profit, Ecotrust.

"We've successfully built a training program for farmers in the Northwest to expand their ability to feed the region. Scale Your Local Catch will expand the model and reach communities across the country, especially low-income communities and areas with low food access," says Tyson Rasor of Ecotrust and one of the grant program partners.

"As a seafood business owner, I am so pleased with this opportunity to expand the Local Catch Network and support business models like ours across the US," says Kerry Marhefka of Abundant Seafood and Executive Committee member of the Local Catch Network. "We must work collectively to demystify seafood as a protein source for consumers, remove physical, financial and educational barriers to access, and foster greater understanding of community supported fisheries as a path to creating more resilient and thriving local economies."

#### **About USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)**

The USDA [Farmers Market Promotion Program](#) (FMPP) funds projects that develop, coordinate and expand direct producer-to-consumer markets to help increase access to and availability of locally and regionally produced agricultural products by developing, coordinating, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, online sales or other direct producer-to-consumer (including direct producer-to-retail, direct producer-to-restaurant and direct producer-to-institutional marketing) market opportunities. A 25% match is required.

#### **About Local Catch Network**

The Local Catch Network, based at the University of Maine, is an inclusive, values-based network of 500+ seafood harvesters, researchers, and community organizations from across North America. LCN members support and promote safe, direct, transparent and profitable "boat to fork" systems of local and regional seafood distribution, such as Community Supported Fisheries (CSFs) and similar models. LCN is governed by a volunteer Executive Committee responsible for supporting the growth and development of the network, with backbone support from the North American Marine Alliance. FMI: <https://localcatch.org/>.

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