

Gulf of Maine Research Institute Branding Standard for Seafood from the Gulf of Maine Region

The Gulf of Maine Certified brand signifies the following:

- 1. The seafood product was harvested or grown and processed in the Gulf of Maine region and meets criteria regarding sustainability and traceability;*
- 2. Supply chain participants have made a commitment to the environmental integrity of their businesses; and*
- 3. A portion of the proceeds contributes to improving the sustainable harvest of seafood from the Gulf of Maine region.*

I. Purpose of the Cooperative Branding Program

This program intends to motivate improvements in the sustainability of our seafood industry by capitalizing on consumer preference for sustainable seafood products from a known origin. For supply chain partners that are part of the Gulf of Maine seafood industry and commit to improving the sustainability of their businesses, participation in this program will enable them to differentiate their products to consumers through the use of the Gulf of Maine cooperative marketing brand.

Market research has demonstrated that consumers are strongly motivated to buy products that have a known origin, particularly if it is local. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, local seafood is not differentiated in the marketplace. Similarly, consumers want to support sustainable seafood options, but are confused by mixed messages around what sustainability is, and they lack access to information regarding their seafood choices, including where and how it was harvested.

Seafood products that meet the standard outlined here will be able to use the Gulf of Maine brand on their packaging, thus enabling consumers to easily identify and support seafood that was harvested from the Gulf of Maine region under specified sustainability criteria.

The ultimate goal is to motivate higher demand for these seafood products in order to create an ecologically and economically stronger Gulf of Maine seafood industry. Simultaneously, through increased consumer demand, supply chain partners will recognize the business benefits of providing responsibly harvested seafood, thus motivating further improvement in sustainability.

II. Background on the GMRI Sustainable Seafood Program

In 2009, the Gulf of Maine Research Institute established the Sustainable Seafood Program to *catalyze and support the evolution of economically and ecologically sustainable fisheries around the Gulf of Maine through the creation of market incentives*. Success of this program will be measured by a thriving seafood industry in the Gulf of Maine region with harvesting, processing, and distribution businesses contributing to the integrity of coastal communities.

To accomplish this goal, GMRI identified three objectives:

1. Develop a **business case** for sustainably-harvested and local seafood
2. Create a **chain-of-custody system** that tracks products from the boat to the plate
3. Develop a **standard and brand** for regionally-harvested products

The theoretical foundation of the program rests on the belief that consumers prefer locally and sustainably harvested seafood options. This program seeks to differentiate seafood products based on their low environmental impact and their place-based Gulf of Maine identity to reward suppliers through greater demand and price premiums.

GMRI works with all partners along the supply chain, including harvesters, processors, and retailers to connect consumers with locally and sustainably-harvested seafood. By developing a *business case* for the consumer preference for these products, this program seeks to motivate supply chain partners to provide locally- and sustainably-harvested seafood. A robust *chain-of-custody system* that enables boat-to-plate traceability of product is essential in assuring that the product being sold has been sourced responsibly. This system also provides valuable information regarding the miles traveled to bring the product to market, which is particularly important in an era of increased concern regarding the impact of fossil fuels.

The *standard*, as detailed in this document, has been developed to provide a foundation for the behaviors GMRI wishes to motivate and reward through the Sustainable Seafood Program. The standard provides the basis for use of the cooperative *brand*, which enables consumers to easily identify products that meet this standard.

III. Development of this Standard

This standard has been developed under a set of principles to allow for broad accessibility to the program while ensuring the program's effectiveness in improving the sustainability and traceability of seafood from the Gulf of Maine. The principles that have guided the development of the standard follow:

- Participation in this program shall require reasonable, not overwhelming or cost-prohibitive, effort.
- The standard shall be accessible and relevant to all supply chain participants, including seafood harvesters and growers, distributors, processors, and retailers.
- The standard shall not discriminate based on harvesting method, so long as the method is legal.
- The standard shall be applicable to all seafood products, from seaweed to salmon, both wild and cultured.
- The program shall reward and enable efforts to improve, or move along a continuum toward, the quality, traceability, and environmental impact of harvesting, procuring, or selling seafood.

This standard has been informed by other existing standards, organizations, and stakeholders including the following:

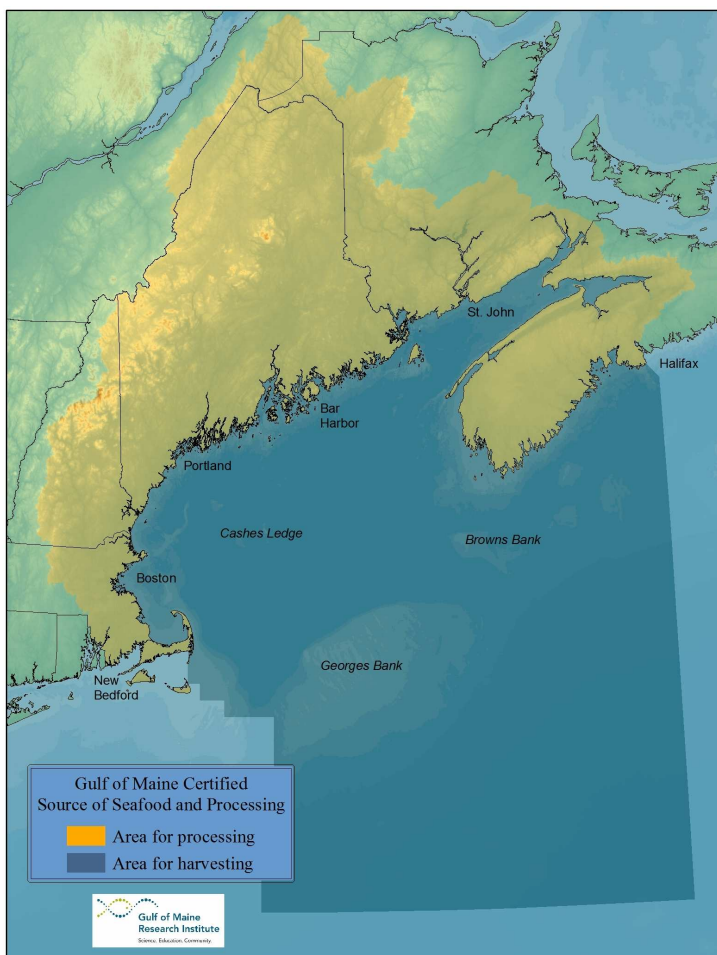
- The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) *Guidelines for the Ecolabeling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries*
- *FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries*

- The Marine Stewardship Council’s (MSC) *Principles and Criteria for Sustainable Fishing, Fisheries Certification Methodology*
- MSC *Chain of Custody Standard*
- World Wildlife Fund’s (WWF) *Aquaculture Dialogues*
- Global Aquaculture Alliance’s (GAA) *Best Aquaculture Practices Standards*
- Maine Aquaculture Association’s (MAA) *Guiding Principles for Responsible Aquaculture in Maine*
- MAA *Code of Practice*.

Development of the standard engaged representatives of fisheries management authorities, the fishing industry, the scientific community, environmental interest groups, fish processors, dealers, and retailers.

IV. The Region

This program wishes to improve the economic and ecologic viability of the seafood industry in Gulf of Maine region. This place-based program accepts seafood that is harvested from the Gulf of Maine, Georges Bank, 5y, 5Ze, and 4X reporting areas and processed within the Gulf of Maine watershed, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as outlined in the chart below.



V. Seafood Qualifications

Products bearing the Gulf of Maine brand must meet minimum requirements around sustainability, traceability, and quality.

For *wild* seafood to qualify for participation in the program, the seafood must have been harvested at a level that enables utilization while maintaining its availability for present and future generations. This includes the following:

- Fisheries are managed by competent authorities and have management plans in place that incorporate a science-based approach to ensure sustainability.
- If stock sizes are below management target levels, whether due to natural or man-made causes, management plans are established that enable rebuilding within a specified timeframe.
- Sufficient data exists to determine harvest levels.
- Monitoring and compliance measures are in place to ensure acceptable harvest levels.
- Enforcement exists to ensure that harvesters follow regulations, and to prevent illegal practices and unreported harvest.

For *farmed* seafood to qualify for participation in the program, production must meet the following criteria:

- It complies with all state and federal regulations.
- Indigenous marine life and its environment are not threatened.
- Discharge of drugs and pesticides is prevented, while discharges of excess feed is minimized.
- Numbers and weights of animals, amounts of feed, and frequency of cleaning, inspections, maintenance, and repairs are recorded and available.

GMRI shall identify wild and farmed seafood products from the Gulf of Maine region that qualify under this minimum requirement, and maintain a list for reference. The research staff at GMRI will review available information for fisheries and farmed products, consulting with outside expertise when appropriate or necessary. Reports detailing the information and process GMRI used to determine whether a seafood product meets the criteria will be made openly available via the web.

GMRI will likely not assess all wild and farmed products, and may entertain requests for special assessments, such as for a small farming operation.

In addition to the seafood product meeting the criteria outlined above, participants in the cooperative marketing program must demonstrate the following:

- The seafood product meets all relevant government regulations regarding its production.
- The seafood product is traceable from the management area in which it was harvested to the point of sale.
- The seafood product was harvested or grown, and processed within the region, which is defined above.
- The seafood product meets basic food safety requirements and quality standards.

Automatic Qualifiers: There is a broad global effort to improve upon the sustainability of the world’s fisheries that involves multitude organizations and stakeholders. GMRI wishes to acknowledge these efforts while simultaneously ensuring the least amount of duplication of effort as possible. To that end, fisheries and aquaculture businesses that have achieved certification from the Marine Stewardship Council, Global Aquaculture Alliance’s Aquaculture Certification Council, or the Maine Aquaculture Association qualify automatically to use the Gulf of Maine brand. (Note: As the World Wildlife Fund’s Aquaculture Dialogues develop into certification opportunities for cultured products, it will be added to this list.)

VI. Continuous Improvement

This program intends to reward and enable efforts to improve, or move along a continuum toward, the quality, traceability, and environmental impact of harvesting, growing, procuring, or selling seafood. To that end, the program will encourage participants to identify and implement improvements to the sustainability of their businesses and the seafood they source. Efforts will be recognized on the web site and in other media as opportunities arise. Annually, participants who have made particularly effective contributions to sustainability will receive special recognition.

GMRI may be available to help participants identify opportunities for continuous improvement. Additionally, GMRI suggests that industry partners review the Common Vision, developed by the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS; www.solutionsforseafood.org), a partnership of more than a dozen Canadian and U.S. organizations.

The Common Vision describes “a future where environmentally sustainable fisheries and aquaculture (or fish farming) thrive along with the communities that depend on them.” Like CASS, GMRI envisions “diverse and productive fisheries and aquaculture systems that deliver seafood on a continuing basis as well as vital environmental benefits necessary for the well-being of all the world’s inhabitants.”

The Common Vision offers some suggested ways in which seafood industry members can contribute to improving seafood sustainability:

- **Make a Commitment:** *Commit to developing and implementing a comprehensive, corporate policy on sustainable seafood.*
- **Collect Data:** *Assess and monitor the environmental sustainability of your seafood products.*
- **Buy Environmentally Responsible Seafood:** *Support environmentally responsible seafood choices through purchasing decisions.*
- **Be Transparent:** *Make information regarding your seafood products publicly available.*
- **Educate:** *Educate your customers, suppliers, employees and other key stakeholders about environmentally responsible seafood.*
- **Support Reform:** *Engage in and support policy and management reform that leads to positive environmental outcomes in fisheries and aquaculture management.*

There are many ways in which seafood supply chain participants can contribute to the sustainability of seafood. Following are some additional opportunities for participants to contribute to continuous improvement:

- Seek and act on opportunities to source more seafood from the Gulf of Maine region.

- Design a flexible seafood procurement system that recognizes seasonal variations in seafood availability; actively promote products that are in season.
- Encourage or require supply chain partners to contribute toward full traceability by maintaining data from the point of harvest to the point of sale.
- Participate in collaborative research.
- Invest in gear or technology or alter behavior in order to decrease the harvest's impact on the environment, including reducing bycatch, reducing impacts to ocean habitats, and decreasing fuel consumption.
- Participate in mitigation efforts, such as derelict gear clean ups.
- Take measures to improve the quality of seafood harvested, including boxing and bleeding at sea, and making shorter tows and trips.
- Increase use of underutilized seafood or bycatch through creative marketing.

VII. Application Process

Any supply chain partner that wishes to participate in the cooperative branding program must first complete a brief that describes the product to be considered. In the brief, the applicant will provide details of the seafood product, proof of traceability, and a description of how the applicant plans to contribute toward seafood sustainability in the coming year.

The Gulf of Maine Research Institute Sustainable Seafood staff will review the information to ensure that the basic requirements have been met. If so, a meeting will be scheduled between the applicant and GMRI to review the applicant's commitment and draft a promissory note that describes the outcomes toward sustainability to be achieved in the coming year.

VIII. Annual Review, and Traceability Audit

Supply chain partners who wish to maintain participation in the cooperative marketing program must agree to an annual review and traceability audit.

For the annual review, the supply chain partner must submit to GMRI a report detailing how it has achieved its promised improvement toward sustainability. To the greatest extent possible, the report should include quantifiable examples of improvements toward sustainability (e.g., increased number of pounds sourced from the Gulf of Maine, a completed corporate policy regarding seafood sustainability, demonstrated consumer education initiatives, etc.). Further, the report shall include the goals for the following year.

Recognizing that the integrity of this program relies on an uncompromised traceability system, supply chain partners must further arrange, and pay for, a third-party audit of the traceability of their products. The results of this audit shall be made available to GMRI.

Continued use of the brand will be contingent on both the annual review and the traceability audit.

IX. Use of Brand

Once a partner has completed the application and review processes outlined in sections VII and VIII, GMRI will issue a licensing agreement that offers permission to use the Gulf of Maine brand developed by this program. The holder of the licensing agreement will contribute a portion of proceeds to the Sustainable Seafood Fund.

X. The Sustainable Seafood Fund

The Sustainable Seafood Fund will cover expenses associated with implementing the cooperative marketing program. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Conducting evaluations of various fisheries and farmed seafood against the standard.
- Brand development, copyrighting, and protection.
- Promotion of the brand and of Gulf of Maine seafood.
- Outreach to industry partners to garner participation and develop strategies that improve seafood sustainability.

Ultimately, this endowment may benefit special projects, such as:

- Research on improving the sustainable harvest or farming of seafood.
- Investments in environmentally friendly or energy-reducing equipment.
- Training for harvesters and supply chain members on sustainable practices.

XI. Review of the Standard

At least once annually, GMRI will engage a broad stakeholder community in a formal review of the standard. The review will strive to include representatives of fisheries management authorities, the fishing industry, the scientific community, environmental interest groups, fish processors and retailers, as well as consumer associations.

Throughout the year, the GMRI Sustainable Seafood Program Manager will provide a point of contact for program-related inquiries and comments. These communications will be logged and will inform the annual review of the standard.

At the end of the first year of the program's implementation, GMRI will seek a third party to conduct a critical review of the program.

Changes proposed as a result of this annual review will be published for comment for a period of one month, after which the revised standard will be published.