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# Success stories

## Direct to consumer

### Growing CSAs

* Local CSAs
* Demand is there – farmers are selling out. Can hire more people
* New American and other farmers

### Interest in farmer markets

* Is growing in Bangor, etc.
* More consumer awareness

### Investments have lowered farm operation costs

* Equipment purchases
	+ Ex Hurricane Farm solar panels help lower costs, lengthen the season

### Agrotourism

* Increase in that
* Knowing where their food comes from
* Part of a lifestyle
* Bring people into Maine
* Food tourism – seasonable menus, farm to table restaurants.

### People growing for themselves

* How is this counted?
* Self-provisioning
* Gardening, fishing, hunting
* How to capture this?
	+ Number of permits
	+ Number of animals

## Land access

* NY example
	+ Development pressures
	+ Immigrant communities wanted to learn about farming
	+ Created a land trust – Providence Food Collective
* SBCA
	+ Example of farmland preservation and access
* Hurricane Farm - in Falmouth,, was going to be developed. Lots of families now have access
* Land for Maines Future

## Increased local processing

### Maine Grains

* They have created a new processing facility
* Maine Grains. Reestablshing an important sector. Bringing back grains and beans.
* Solutions: Pea protein – large global need; peas could be grown here.
* Support local businesses (like Maine Grains) and groups (like Maine Farmland Trust).

### Seafood industry

### More local protein processing

* Halal meat as well
* Unity Five Pillars– Coop model – starting soon
* Could provide models for scalability

### Distribution

* Farm Drop and Daybreak Growers Alliance – they create the middle ground between direct to consumer and grocery stores. Many options for pickup locations – lean more on these regional distribution systems. Will help support more rural areas.

### Farm to institution

* Institutional buying models have seen success (hospitals, university system, correctional facilities) - these are discrete universes with distinct sideboards. Are there things we can learn from how these groups have made progress that could be transferrable to retail or restaurant sectors??

### Farm to school

* Fishermen feeding Mainers – dontion program 1 mil meals provided to K-12 schools.
* Educating at schools – taste testing, Demonstration kitchens DOE has one
* Increasing salary for cafeteria workers
* Demonstration kitchens, demonstrating local produce, what’s in season and weeknight approachable recipes.
* Incentives for Maine foods to Maine public schools
* How can this be replicated in other settings?
* Maine farm to sea to school

## State funded programs connect farms to the underserved

* LFPA, Harvesting Good, Mainers Feeding Mainers
	+ increased Maine’s food pantry distribution chain’s capacity to move Maine foods to food insecure Mainers.
* Hunters for the Hungry
* SNAP, WIC, MFFM Bumper Crop, Maine Nutrition Incentives
* Maine Coast Fisherman feeding Mainers
	+ Program has elevated the idea of getting fish harvested by ME fishermen into schools and food banks.
* Based on donations and grants
	+ What will happen when these funding sources end?
	+ Opportunities to focus energy to sustain these pathways?
* Ending Hunger by 2030 initiative – looking at upstream issues related to hunger. Addressing the root causes.
* ME Prevention Network – infrastructure in place at the local level across ME. Supporting that effort could assist with breaking down the barriers.
* Statue to get Maine institutions to purchase 20% local by 2025.
* Fisheries have seen hope in development of immigrant communities in Maine who eat more fish.
* Farm Fresh Rewards at MFT was equivalent to Maine Harvest Bucks. Direct to consumer is important and during pandemic this grew, out of necessity. Don’t know what that looks like now and if those relationships continued. Many organizations are primed to do that work, but need more consumer education – some of those institutions have faltered. Over time, there hasn’t been sustained funding (Unity, KVCC...) This work could help inform the larger outlets. Food piece has been left out of climate education area.

## Support for food businesses

### DECD Domestic Trade Program

* Funding to brand and promote Maine products
* Can this be sustained beyond ARPA?

### Seafood Accelerator Program and Maine Food Accelerators Program

* Providing technical support and research (transportation and logistic reports) to show gaps and inform recommendations for strategic planning. (e.g. storage, distribution, economy of scale getting to market, preventing storage loss)
* <https://www.seamaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/SeaMaine-Transportation-Report.FINAL_.pdf>

### Administrative support for groups

* That are working on new crops
* Research on new crops
* Shared storage funding

### Expanding food businesses

* Expanding Top Gun program into Ellsworth.
* Growth in aquaculture growing Downeast.
* Lucky to have farmers – land and sea – who are VERY collaborative to develop solutions. Also with processing (Fork Food Lab).

# Strengths

## Producers

### Farmland availability

* Maine has agricultural land and young farmers moving to the state

### Food production diversification

* We have both commodity farms and diversified farms and seafood this is an advantage we can take advantage of all

### Advances in farming

* Ideal time from a Crop production standpoint, precision ag, resilient crop strain research, Land

### More infrastructure

* Pandemic forced adaptation and opened other market opportunities. Covid funding has now dried up but we have infrastructure assets that we didn’t have before.

## The value of Maine food

### Maine produce/products are esteemed

* When price is competitive, people want to buy Maine
* Maine is perceived as high quality
* Real Maine Agriculture Directory
* DMR Seafood Directory
* Sea Maine Program
* Supplier Directories
* Promotions to increase consumer interest/buy-in/consumption
* Demand curve for shop local is much higher post covid
* Local is often perceived as healthy
* High value placed on local food in Maine. A hyper local culture exists here that isa real draw to coming to Maine. It’s unique to northern New England. We’re not dominated by franchises. We have many single operators and small businesses. We’re not mostly exporting which has made room for more diversified operations to grow.

### Maine’s Natural Resources

* Food producers are often concerned with social and environmental impacts

## Increased demand for local food

### Large companies, institutions talking about the value of local food

### Increased consumer demand for local food

### Maine foods are in retail markets (not at level wanted, but they are there)

* Majority of harvesters are not selling direct to consumer
* Relationships with retailers and distributors exist and this provides an opportunity to move the needle

## Investment in the local food system

### Nonprofit funding

* The amount of agricultural support in the state – ngos, research institutions, the state – we have more infrastructure support than other states. Could really be capitalized.

### State and federal investments

* Collaborative funding sources across state agencies are helpful. We’re in 3-year cycles of program funding which is a real challenge.
* Infusion of federal and state resources (IRA, COVID etc)
* IRA funds for infrastructure for high tunnel to extend the season, and urban ag (assist with food access equity) increase local crop production and minimize distribution
	+ Technology is becoming more affordable esp. Drone tech. Eg. field monitoring, pest control, pesticide.

### Seafood investment

* foreign investment in seafood in the state

### TA providers

Support from service providers, eg., UMCE, MOFGA, etc. For market access. For climate resilience. Interest and collaboration.

* Importance of farm profitability is great. Farmers need to be able to make a living. MFT Farm Business Planning efforts were VERY successful. It’s a hard area to fund! It’s not regularly funded in the Farm Bill (maybe regional farm business centers).
* Maine Federation of Farmers’ Markets is adding more staff who work on education and outreach – Good Food Bus is one example of bringing local food to meet specific regional and market needs.

### Research

* Research institutions are providing the necessary information for growers to adapt to climate change and maintain market channels, and researcher relationship with growers is strong. Real credit to CES and others.

# Opportunities

## Production

### Land

* Cost of farmland is more attractive in more remote areas, but leads to bigger marketing challenges.

### Address farm bottlenecks

* Storage
* Energy efficiency

### More support for local food cooperatives

* Access to capital – all types
* Technical assistance
* Dairy, farms, grocery stores
* Is a trucking cooperative a possible solution?
* Efficiencies in grading produce/products to reach collective retail markets.
* Cooperatives work to improve products rather than compete amongst themselves
* Examples of cooperatives where not everyone is a grower/packer/processor but efficiencies are created to spread the resources are the most successful.
* Retailers would like to buy local food, but need reliable supplies, consistent quality, and streamlined transfer/delivery. Good model is co-op of farmers who assigns a representative to market the food. However, most of those contracts between retailers and co-ops will require farms to conform to certain requirements (ie: specific production methods/certifications/product standards or control the amount of product that can be produced/sold under the contract). Farms may not want to operate under those conditions.
* Midwest farming culture farming coops could be used as a model (providing further sales channels for further crops. Aggregating opportunities.
* Model is interesting enough to study. Contract producer under the umbrella of larger organization:
* Can we get commodity coop model in fruits and veggies as we have in potatoes, blueberries, diary?

### Understand the consumer

* Take this education one step further—it would be great to try to focus on educating farmers on what the grocer-level consumer is looking for? Pricing? Quality? Scheduling? It’s hard to know the different standards for the different customers.

### Grow more culturally important crops

* What new produce can be grown - eggplant, greens
* Purchasing is subsidized
* Collaboration around increasing culturally important crops
* Coordination around what federal and state resources – providing resources to scale up, make season extension

### Scale up – or not

* Scaling up is critical to meet the goal of feeding more Maine food to Maine people. Scale is relative (is: ME is not going to scale up to compete head-to-head with large-scale/national brands), but our expectations should be sized for our ME food needs, production types, and processing needs.
* Already have several Maine brands/groups that are doing this who could serve as a model for other production sectors. (Ex. Milk – ME processors aggregate milk from many farms and process/package/market the milk.
* Food safety is important – need to keep prioritizing ME food as safe food. (Note: food safety regulations & practices are time consuming and do add cost to local food – which adds to the price point at which local food is sold – compared to national/mass produced.)
* There are assets in our culture that want to support local businesses; there is a Maine aversion to “big.

### Forward contracting

* Could grocers/buyers help fund farmers earlier in the season? Small businesses in Maine are down early in the year—how do you create revenue? There are points in the year that support is needed.

## Processing

### Support for small scale processing facilities

* Need to study specific dynamics for multiple types of food production at the processing and marketing levels to understand the best possible approach.
* Preference for local, yes, but with limits. Study need for shared infrastructure. How to protect small producers while facilitiating scale. Can be done: Backyard farm. Private label potatoes. Oakhurst. Wyman’s. Investments can be made to combine forces, that unlocks next level up in local consumption. Scale in conflict (a bit) with traceability.
* If there was financial support for these, would make a huge difference

### Value added

* Lots of potential
* Apples, potatoes. What are the crops that are abundant. Finding value added routes.
* How do we not compete in the big world because we can’t? Where’s our niche? Can we leverage our geography?

### More direct to consumer

* People are participating more in farmers markets, there's an interest in local food. How do you get the next group of people to buy into local food? How do we get to the tipping point?
* Can we be fair to get this food into people’s homes who can’t afford it?
* Direct to consumer customer base is growing; more sites would be helpful, as well as more education. Could further incentivize, particularly in rural areas. More sites needed. Need to think broadly about how to incentivize buyers to direct purchases.
* Population density is a critical piece of direct to consumer being successful. Some locations are appropriate; others aren’t. In sparser areas, it’s not effective to go directly to consumers.

### Workforce development

* More support for building the training programs for production workers

## Consumers

### Increased consumer education

* Climate change benefits for buying local – connect the dots for consumers
* With institutions, retail level where the consumer is purchasing
* Shifting public health messaging to current nutrition science. Shifting what consumers consume toward whole foods.
* Retail as key connection for consumers to identify local food.
* Advertising at multiple levels (not just at the point of sale) is important to educate ME consumers. This is a responsibility of all levels.
* Coordinated/collaborative marketing is a key tool to bring small farmers together to distribute product – look to a co-operative model (farmer-owned “middle” to connect farmers to processors or retailers). Already have several Maine processors who are successfully aggregating food from many Maine farms. The wholesaler/marketer representing many farms is key.
* Need at the consumer level about the impact of buying local in regards to both climate change and nutrition (the approach for nutrition-focused marketing has been successful).
* Healthy eating – we spend 7-8% on food and 17-18% on health care; that’s an issue. Making good healthy eating a priority.
* Marrying public health/nutrition/climate change – public awareness campaign to show the connections. Would be great to see Maine being one of the leading states. “One Health” term.
* Different generations – there's a lot of opportunity in the next generation, who has a key point of interest in sustainability. How will this form their buying habits and interests?
* How do we educate consumers around preparation, cooking, etc. How to best use local food? Promote the different seasons (it’s now root season)?

### Build on the recent interest in local food

* Local food production for food security
* Started during COVID
* Supply chains shut down due to Covid – showed us the importance of robust regional food system
* Direct to consumer – we saw some of that during covid. How do we leverage that and grow it.
* COVID highlighted the vulnerabilities of a global food system

## Support for retailers

* Retailers are the key connection point for consumers and the primary location to purchase food. Need to continue to support our retailers who are working to promote ME food at the point of sale. Need to expand the number of retailers and methods of identifying ME food.
* How do we elevate / increase visibility of Maine products in the marketplace?

### Demographic changes

* 30,000 new people to the state
* Opportunities
* Population is more diverse
* New people have higher incomes, so could purchase more local food
* People moving to Maine to grow food, people excited to eat local food,

## Institutions

* Institutions have the opportunity to purchase and also teach and develop tastebuds

## The broader New England market represents a big opportunity

* Local Food Fund – schools purchasing local. could we increase to a tiered regional approach.

### Reduce food waste to increase Maine food ability to reach the plate

* Increase processing, logistical capacity to rescue foods and turn to value added food products
* Achieves climate goals and increased consumption of ME foods
* Must be more efficient in food production

## Systemic opportunities

### Collaboration

* The fact that this group exists is the start of a solution. We work in silos and may not have the exposure to other groups. Getting all these constituents around the table to learn from one another the obstacles and barriers. This could lead us to a good direction of the state.
* Bring people together to identify and solve for barriers
* How do regulatory issues and retail issues compliment/contradict each other?
* How can efficiencies be realized through cooperation rather than working in parallel systems?

### Financial support

* For things that are working
* Consistent
* Be able to plan
* There has been funding coming through (like Climate funding and processing funding), how do we get climate resilience dollars into these groups?

### Financial incentive programs

* Notes that in partnership with MOFGA, [did not catch additional organizations], looking at nutrition and SNAP benefits in context of farmers markets/farm stands. Group of organizations supporting access to SNAP, have mapped out that funding $600,000 and up to $1.2 million would be beneficial to local economic benefits and to improve food security for low resource families. Supporting having New Americans having access to infrastructure, as well as emphasizing short term benefits. Consistency of support at the state level for funding is a major challenge. Challenging to continue to support WIC, SNAP. Supporting at state level is important.

### Policy

* We can impact and influence policy in a good way. In larger states this is more difficult. The Maine legislature is very accessible. Even the congressional delegation and governor are accessible. It’s a small state, but very accessible.
* There is a lot of opportunity to be able to proactively support legislation. What are the policy pieces we could bring?
* There is a legislative rule (from 1956), if you are a local farmer and processing local chickens, once you go over 10,000 chickens you have to be USDA inspected. There are only a couple of producers in Maine who are held back by this legislation, so more chicken needs to imported. There are similar issues in the meat-protein world. There is a lamb farmer who faces the same issue with scheduling around slaughter houses. Lack of processing facilities is a problem.
	+ The big chicken producers are lobbying agaisnt this as they don’t want chicken producers to grow here in the state?
	+ There may be other examples?
	+ Why is the legislation the way it is and could we change it to unleash opportunities here in the state?
* An electricity subsidy for agricultural producers could be helpful!
* Larger retail piece: green tech has used tax incentives – could that be used for larger retailers to incentivize more local buying – Supermarkets have existing relationships and contracts and more local buying needs to be equally

### Track all (as much as possible) Maine foods regardless of distribution means

* Don’t just focus on traditional food access
* We cannot forget the people who don’t have access to foods
* We all have to eat and consume a certain amount of calories to live
* Do game meats harvested from hunting/fishing count? Deer, moose, large game are tracked by weight at tagging station.
* NEFNE By 2030, 30% of the food consumed in New England “produced, harvested, or caught” in New England
	+ Can an economic impact/value be assigned to harvested animal weight?
	+ Does IFW have a data informed estimate of how much fish is consumed by Maine residents with fishing licenses? Tricky because no weigh stations for fish and lots of fishermen/women catch and release.
* Are we counting food pantry distributions or just retail sales of Maine foods?
* Are we counting food rescue, gleaning, food rescue?
* Are we counting school meals?
* National consumer preference surveys – dairy and maple
* USDA commodity markets
* Do a consumer preference survey
	+ Are changing bc of changing migration and the pandemic
	+ Hospitality maine – increase in fast food
* What would people want to buy vs. are able to buy