MEDIA ADVISORY: UNH Launches New Offshore Fish Cage

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UNH Open Ocean Aquaculture Project

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What: Researchers from the University of New Hampshire's Open Ocean Aquaculture Project will launch the prototype for a new offshore fish cage to test in the Gulf of Maine. The cage was developed in partnership with New Hampshire–based JPS Industries, Inc., with the support of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Small Business Innovation Research Program.

When: Thursday, June 29, noon to 3 p.m.

Where: New Hampshire State Port Authority on 555 Market Street, Portsmouth N.H.

Background: The Open Ocean Aquaculture Project explores the environmental safety, technical feasibility, and economic viability of farming finfish and shellfish in exposed ocean environments. The project was founded in 1998 with support from Senator Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) and in partnership with NOAA. Researchers operate a 30-acre field site, six miles off the coast in N.H. State waters. Deep sea farming infrastructure such as cages and moorings are submerged 40 feet below the water's surface to avoid the impact of the winds and waves of the North Atlantic. Offshore aquaculture is an emerging industry in the U.S., and legislation to allow its commercial practice in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone is pending in Congress.

The JPS cage was developed in response to a need for more adaptable and cost-effective submersible fish cages that can withstand the rugged conditions of the open ocean. It consists of two concentric rings from which a drum-shaped net pen is suspended. By pumping water in or out of the inner ring, fish farm operators will be able to more precisely control the depth at which the cage is suspended.

Currently available submerged cages are designed to be moored at a fixed depth. The JPS cage, however, will allow fish farmers to control the cage so that they can use it to farm different species of fish that thrive at different depths. This capacity also makes the cage more user-friendly and safer to operate and maintain.

The prototype is the product of two years of design and hydrostatic, stability, and hydrodynamic testing by faculty and research scientists at UNH. Structural and finite element analyses have been promising. The next step is to see how the prototype fares at the OOA's demonstration site.

JPS Industries, Inc. is based in Bristol, N.H. The company manufactures, installs, and maintains environmental engineering infrastructure such as baffle systems to treat paper mill wastewater and booms to manage oil spills.

RSVP: Security is tight at the Port Authority pier. To gain access, reporters and photographers must contact Dolores Leonard (603-862-3685; dolores.leonard@unh.edu) in advance.