

Fish Farming Finds Support in UNH Survey

By *Christine Fagan*
UNH News Bureau

November 29, 2000

DURHAM, N.H. -- New Hampshire Seacoast residents support the development of open ocean aquaculture in New England. In a recent University of New Hampshire survey studying attitudes toward aquaculture, more than 85 percent of the participants indicated they think it is a good idea.

A growing industry in the region, aquaculture involves the raising of finfish, shellfish and seaweed in containment structures in the ocean.

Participants also were asked what they see as potential advantages of aquaculture. The most common responses were that it could replenish natural fish populations and increase the quantity and quality of seafood available.

Rob Robertson, associate professor in UNH's Department of Resource Economics and Development, said he is conducting this research because the development of a significant and sustainable marine aquaculture industry in northern New England is largely dependent on the ability of coastal resource managers and planners, aquaculturists, and the community to design and develop the industry in a way that reflects the interests and values of the public.

The telephone interviews were conducted by the UNH Survey Center, and marked the beginning of a five-step study funded by New Hampshire Sea Grant. The study aims to understand the public's opinions toward open ocean aquaculture, and to develop and evaluate the effects of balanced information presented in two types of media.

The N.H. Seacoast region was the primary area of study, with the towns of Rockland, Maine, and Worcester, Mass., included for quantitative comparison. Seven-hundred and fifty-three households from the three communities were surveyed. Four-hundred and thirty of these were from the Seacoast, 160 from Rockland and 163 from Worcester.

The study is guided by a 12-person advisory committee with members from organizations including the N.H. Department of Fish and Game, the N.H. Department of Environmental Services, the Seacoast Science Center, the Southern Maine Regional Planning Board and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

In the next phase of the study, Robertson plans to develop a video and brochure providing impartial, balanced information to participants. He will then evaluate how each of these materials affects the opinions of test subjects.

"Understanding how people respond to balanced information is very important," says Robertson. "Many times the public opinion is uninformed. Some argue that the public can never make a truly informed decision, but I think they can."

New Hampshire Sea Grant is a component of the National Sea Grant College Program, a network of university-based research, education and extension efforts that promote the wise use, conservation and development of our marine resources.

[Back to UNH News Bureau](#)