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# Maine seafood initiative celebrates 1 million meals served to families facing food insecurity

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## Collaboration between Maine fishermen, seafood processors, food banks and schools infuses \$2.2 million into local economy

In just three years since its inception, Fishermen Feeding Mainers has served more than one million meals to families facing food insecurity in communities throughout Maine. The program was launched by the **Maine Coast Fishermen's Association** (<https://www.mainecoastfishermen.org/>) (MCFA), a local non-profit focused on rebuilding the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and sustaining Maine's fishing communities for future generations.

Since October 2020, the program has supplied fresh local seafood directly from Maine fishermen to more than 250 food banks and over 30 school districts, providing countless Mainers with a healthy, high-quality and free source of protein. More than \$2.2 million has been infused back into the Maine economy through the program to date.

“Our initial goal was to donate 100,000 meals while also supporting fishermen and Maine’s working



Collaboration between Maine's seafood sector, food banks and schools addressed food insecurity and infused millions into the local economy. Photo courtesy of Maine Coast Fishermen's Association.

waterfront, and we have far surpassed that through the generosity of the community," said Mary Hudson, director of fisheries programs at MCFA. "The success of this program would not be possible without the collaboration and dedication of local fishermen and seafood processors who first came together to help put healthy, local food on the tables of Maine families while they were also struggling."

MCFA purchases fish directly from Maine fishermen, which is then processed locally and donated to food banks, schools and other community organizations. To date, it has purchased more than 800,000 pounds of fish, including haddock, cod, monkfish, flounders (such as dabs and grey sole) and pollock. The fish goes directly to schools and food banks, including those that serve predominantly immigrant populations, providing them access to a source of high-quality, sustainable protein.

(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

The program was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to help sustain fishermen and families in Maine. When the food system and restaurants closed, many of Maine's fishermen, who had already seen declining value in their fleets, were not able to sell the fish they caught, leaving them unable to support their families. At the same time, food insecurity in Maine skyrocketed and the MCFA saw the opportunity to both provide financial relief for Maine fishermen and help feed Maine families.



## Food is abundant, yet people are starving

While significant numbers of people are undernourished, an increasing number of people are overweight. The divide between recommendations and results is marked, so we must learn more about food production and change our behaviors.



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“Participating in Fishermen Feeding Mainers has been an incredibly rewarding experience for me both personally and as a member of the MCFA and Maine commercial fishing industry,” said fisherman Vincent Balzano, owner/operator of F/V Northern Lights out of Portland. “Being able to help feed my neighbors is an important part of why I became a fisherman, and I am proud that I am able to help put healthy food on the tables of families in my community.”

Based on the success of the program, MCFA plans to continue it indefinitely and is seeking grants, donations and sponsors to subsidize the cost. It will also continue to sell its Maine Coast Monkfish Stew at more than 50 stores and restaurants in Maine and beyond, with 100 percent of proceeds supporting the program.

“Food insecurity continues to be an issue in our state as we move beyond the pandemic with one in four Maine children at risk for hunger,” said Don Morrison, operations director at Wayside Food Programs in Portland. “Fishermen Feeding Mainers has had a measurable impact on our ability to serve families in need, and we are extremely grateful to continue working with MCFA and local fishermen and seafood processors on this program.”

For more information on the MCFA's Fishermen Feeding Mainers program or to make a direct donation, [click here \(https://maine-coast-fishermens-association.networkforgood.com/projects/109923-fishermen-feeding-mainers\)](https://maine-coast-fishermens-association.networkforgood.com/projects/109923-fishermen-feeding-mainers).

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