

SUMMER 2020

# ALLIANCE

The Magazine for the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance

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**Seafood Industry  
Outlook Persisting  
Despite COVID-19**

**COVID-19 Related  
Support for Nova  
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**PUBLICATION INFORMATION**

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Published by: CRE8 Art Centre Ltd. (Marketing)  
304-40 Regency Park Dr., Halifax, NS B3S 1L4  
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# Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance: Comings and Goings

*By: Leo Muise, Executive Director  
Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance*

Currently, the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance is made up of 95 regular members and 47 associate members. The growth during 2019 and 2020 has been remarkable.

The winter of 2020 will be remembered as possibly the most challenging time in the recent history of Nova Scotia. Not only has COVID-19 shut down a significant portion of the economy and devastated the Northwood Seniors Home, but the tragic murders in Colchester County and loss of a Navy helicopter crew and a local Snowbirds crew member have made the winter of 2020 a time that will not soon be forgotten.

Most major seafood markets throughout the world declined to levels not seen

in a long time. During March and April, we did witness the early stages of the return of the Pacific Rim (Chinese) lobster market. Anecdotal information indicates the world market for lobster at the end of April was about 30-40% of what it normally would be.

Markets for groundfish products and snow crab have not been as negatively affected as lobster has. Snow crab inventories were low when the spring seasons opened and groundfish is a reliable and key source of high-quality protein. Matching product supply to market demand remains a work in progress and frequently changes from week to week and sometimes day to day.

The compulsion to provide everyone with as safe a

working environment as possible has required massive changes to the structure of most processing facilities. The introduction of social distancing whenever possible and the mandatory use of additional personal protective equipment (PPE) can be expensive and sometimes difficult to achieve.

Fortunately, government assistance programs are to some extent easing the burden for those companies who can gain access to them.

The COVID-19 virus has had a damaging effect on the whole Nova Scotia economy. Schools and universities have closed and moved to online learning. Medical facilities and doctor's offices have been restricted to virtual visits where possible. Most of-

office-based employees are working from home and travel, restaurants, and many retail operations either closed or their level of operation was greatly reduced. People are staying the blazes home and main-

unprecedented situation where options and risks change daily. The industry is focused on staying viable and keeping people safe — including staff, family, and friends — in anticipation of the return to normalcy.

provide for proper social distancing.

The AGM is a great opportunity to participate in alliance business, hear about the latest issues facing the seafood industry, and network with colleagues, meet old friends and make new ones. The theme this year will focus on technology upgrades and needs.

Looking ahead, 2021 is lining up to be a year of change, challenges, and adjustment for Nova Scotia seafood industry. Along with the lingering effects of COVID-19 and the “new normal”, creating new markets, re-establishing lost markets, assuring everyone’s safety, adjusting to the new economic reality, climate change and resource sustainability are the new reality.

Working together, NSSA member companies continue to provide support to each other and expert advice to decision-makers. These are challenging times filled with opportunity, and members of the alliance are well positioned to make the most of nature’s greatest gift to Nova Scotia.



***Even Gus was keeping his distance when out for his daily walk.***

taining a social distance when they did go out. To avoid exposure to COVID-19, all meetings since March 15th were held by phone or video conferencing. During this time of crisis, communication between parties dependent on each other is critical. Both the federal and provincial governments were in constant contact with representatives of the Seafood Alliance and harvester groups to discuss options for moving forward. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an

These are not easy tasks, and will challenge everyone in the business to stay calm and make good decisions. Hopefully, we will all continue working together because it does work.

The Annual Meeting of the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance is tentatively scheduled this year for September 12th in Halifax. Because of the uncertainty caused by COVID-19 the exact location has not been determined and will depend on the ability to

# Government Support for Seafood Industry During the COVID-19 Pandemic

with **Bernadette Jordan**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak directly to readers of the Summer 2020 edition of *Alliance* during what has been a very challenging year. The seafood sector was one of the first to feel the impacts of the Covid-19. In response, our government has invested over \$500 million to help support the hardworking women and men of our fisheries.

To deliver these funds, we created the Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund (CSSF), the Fish Harvester Benefit, and the Fish Harvester Grant. These new programs take into account the unique operational structures of the industry. Still, we know this season will be a challenge. To address that gap, we change the Fisher's EI system to allow harvesters and sharepersons to file their claims based on previous years' earnings.

Our government's measures will not just benefit

the seafood sector. As a proud Nova Scotian and



Atlantic Canadian, I know how important our fisheries are to our province's economy, the country's food supply chain, and to our identities as coastal people.

In Nova Scotia alone, our fisheries are responsible for approximately 18,000 jobs. In 2019, Canadian fish and seafood exports rose to \$7.4 billion, with Nova Scotia leading the way. The industry went into this pandemic strong, but we knew this year was going to be unlike anything we've seen before. Tens of thousands of Canadians were count-

ing on this fishing season for employment, for revenue, and for food.

We first saw the impact of Covid-19 on the seafood sector in January with the decline of the Chinese export markets. As the spring season approached, we began planning amidst an uncertain global market.

We knew that in order to stabilize the industry as a whole, we would need to develop programs that provided financial support at every step of the value chain. Harvesters needed to know they would have buyers as well as financial support to offset the downturn this season. When the markets started to recover, we knew we needed to be ready to take advantage of every revenue opportunity. The window to harvest certain stock is limited, so products needed to be stored longer and new markets needed to be found. With export markets declining, and the domestic food

supply chain becoming more important than ever, the industry would need to cater more to Canadians, and Canadians were no longer eating in restaurants, but purchasing seafood at the store and from local harvesters.

In early May, we introduced the CSSF. This is \$62.5 million invested directly into the processing sector to help tackle these challenges and help plants adapt to new ways of working.

Processors can tap into the funds to increase their storage capacity, allowing them to buy more from harvesters and aquaculture operators. As we try to reach new domestic buyers, these funds can help rebranding and marketing efforts to meet these new consumers' tastes. It is expensive for plants to put in place the new manufacturing and automated technologies required to create a product destined for the grocery store, as opposed to upscale restaurant. The sector should not have to bear that cost alone. And above all, workers need to be safe. So the CSSF can be used to help offset the cost of implementing health and safety measures, including non-disposable personal protective equipment.

We recognize that many companies have already made significant investments to prepare their facilities and adapt their practices, so the funding will be retroactive to March 15, 2020.

By investing over half a billion into the seafood sector, our goal is not only to ensure that workers get the financial support they need right now, and that the industry as a whole is placed in a strong position for recovery.

As I write this, we are just starting to see a glimpse of that recovery. As minister, I hope to help guide the industry through the pandemic, and to work together towards a reimagined future that is supported by strategic investments, innovations and clean technologies. That is why we continue to partner with the provincial governments in Atlantic Canada to encourage applications to the \$400 million Atlantic Fisheries Fund (AFF). The AFF is financing new ways to harvest, process and deliver fish and seafood – and we are proud to continue working with Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance on their initiatives.

We are also moving forward with the development

of Canada's first-ever aquaculture act and renewing the regulatory framework. This will help provide more business certainty, create the right conditions for responsible growth and innovation, while ensuring strong environmental protections. As always, we will develop this in close collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous peoples, industry and civil society.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address your members directly. This has been an exceptionally difficult time, and especially for the women and men whose careers and livelihoods are tied to the fisheries. But this is a resilient industry, and one that has never failed to come back after a tough season.

On behalf of our government, thank you for working tirelessly through this pandemic to maintain Canada's reputation as a world-class provider of sustainably sourced fish and seafood.

Sincerely,

**The Honourable  
Bernadette Jordan, M.P.,  
P.C. Minister of Fisheries,  
Oceans and the Canadian  
Coast Guard**

# Perennia's Seafood Accelerator Program

Perennia's Seafood Accelerator Program is actively helping Nova Scotia-based companies grow by diversifying their markets and developing new products. Have you been thinking of an idea for a new seafood product that you want to commercialize? Do you have a new product that needs some adjustments before it is ready to hit the market? Are you interested in expanding into new international markets? If so, this funding program can provide you with the financial assistance, support and technical expertise needed to achieve these goals and help your business thrive.

Program funding is available until March 31, 2021, under the following three streams:

## 1. New Market Access

- If you've been eyeing the European or Asian market, this funding supports companies in obtaining Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) certification to open new export markets or maintain current ones. Perennia's team of Quality and Food Safety Specialists can provide you with services such as:

- Gap assessments to assess what steps companies need to take in order to meet all requirements for a specific standard such as SQF or BRC;

- Program coaching, quality assurance plan development and employee training; and
- Pre-audit assessments in preparation for official third-party audits

## 2. New Product Creator

- Have you been thinking of creating a new product line such as a chowder, burger, sauce, or meal kit? This funding stream assists companies in successfully commercializing new value-added seafood products. The goal is to create product prototypes and develop the manufacturing processes required to bring a new product to market. Eligible services include market validation studies, nutritional labeling, prototype development and scale-up support. Special consideration will be given to new products created from seafood by-product streams. We can help turn your waste into a new profit stream.

## 3. Overcoming Technical Obstacles -

This funding supports companies that already have a product in the market, or have a prototype that is ready-to-commercialize but are facing a technical challenge that is preventing them from moving forward. Our

team of food scientists can help to improve value-added seafood products through technical support and consultation. Eligible services include but are not limited to, recipe reformulation, shelf-life determination and extension, analytical testing, packaging solutions, and process modification, optimization and scale-up.

All projects are cost-shared 50/50 with successful applicants, and companies are eligible to receive up to \$15,000 in funding through the Seafood Accelerator Program.

Perennia is ready to provide the additional support and guidance you need to take your business or product idea to the next level. We encourage interested companies to contact our

Seafood Accelerator Program Coordinator, Ashley Sprague, at 902-955-0248 or by email at [asprague@perennia.ca](mailto:asprague@perennia.ca) for additional

information and program eligibility requirements. **Visit our website at [www.perennia.ca/seafood](http://www.perennia.ca/seafood) to learn more.**



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# Food-Safety Auditors and Auditing from an Auditor's Perspective

All food-processing establishments in Nova Scotia must be licenced or registered with the Province of Nova Scotia and/or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. As well, there is growing pressure for processing plants to be third-party certified under the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI). With these licencing and certification requirements comes the need to be audited by government and/or third-party auditors on a frequent basis. Most facilities now are audited by a variety of food-safety auditors, with some plants audited up to 5-8 times a year depending upon their certifications. As an example, if a fish plant produces product for export from Nova Scotia, there is the CFIA auditing process; if the same plant is BRC certified and processes product for chains such as Burger King/ McDonalds/Costco, etc. then there is an audit for the BRC and an "addendum" audit attached for the specific food vendor.

Auditing has emerged as one of the most common processes for evaluating a processing plant's food-safety system, for compliance to the government regulatory requirements and to third-party certification. Whether a facility is being audited by a government auditor or a third-party food-safety auditor, there are some very important key attributes that all auditors should exhibit at all times. These attributes are there to ensure that the plant management is treated fairly and professionally, and also to ensure a thorough unbiased audit is performed.

There are many sources that define what makes a competent and successful auditor. The GFSI has "Food Safety Auditor Competencies Guidelines", Safe Food 360 has a whitepaper, the ISO group has various directives and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has guidelines for its auditors. All sources have very similar wordings, but their message is basically the same.

Here are key attributes common throughout the auditing world that outline what all auditors should be:

- **Open-minded** – All auditors must show that they are willing to listen and consider the point of view of plant management, and to consider alternatives to program delivery.
- **Diplomatic** – Auditors should be considerate of all plant personnel, be tactful and be courteous at all times during the audit.
- **Versatile** – Auditors will find that an audit sometimes doesn't go as planned and he/she must be able to adapt to fluid situations, such as only a portion of the plant operating at the time of the audit, the QA person on vacation, etc.
- **Tenacious** – Auditors need to look deeply into the food-safety program's delivery. This is for the

good of both the auditor and plant management as both are wanting the same thing, a strong food-safety system that works well and does not pose risks.

- **Decisive** – The auditors must develop sound concrete positions based upon the information presented to him/her during the audit.
- **Self-reliant** - Auditors must be able to operate independently during an audit, while at the same time working with plant personnel in performing the audit.
- **Observant** – When an auditor is in the facility he/she must be observant of the condition of the plant, the ongoing operations, health and safety measures to prevent injury to themselves and others and when reviewing documentation associated with the plant’s food safety system such as CCP records and SOPs.
- **Perceptive** – This attribute is gained through years of being in the food-processing world in one format or another. The auditor must understand how operations work, and understand situations that occur and what their ramifications could be.
- **Good Communicator** – All auditors must be able to clearly explain and defend decisions in terms understood easily by all, especially plant management. The auditor must be able to respond to queries and provide clarification.

- **Ethical** – This should go without saying, but, all auditors must show that he/she can be trusted to perform an unbiased audit and show integrity in their relationship with plant management. This is done through

*continued on page 13*



**OAFS**

Ocean Agri-Food Solutions Ltd.

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- Areas of Expertise:
- ✓ Food Safety, Food Inspection Auditing (HACCP, BRC and FSSC Certified)
  - ✓ Developing/Preparing Food Safety Systems for Food
  - ✓ Processing Facilities moving to GFSI Certification including BRC Global Standard and the FSSC Food Standard
  - ✓ Assisting Processors in attaining and maintaining CFIA compliance to the “Safe Food for Canadians” Regulations
  - ✓ Performing GAP analyses to the GFSI Standards;
  - ✓ HACCP Certified
  - ✓ Food Safety Systems Development
  - ✓ Problem Resolution
  - ✓ International Review
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  - ✓ Program Reviews and Impact Analysis Studies
  - ✓ Project Management

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We are here to assist food processors, government departments and agencies and anyone involved in food safety. Give us a call!

# Giving Thanks: Production Plant Employees Keep the Line Moving During the COVID-19 Pandemic

While countries around the world have seen an unprecedented number of layoffs and some industries have ground to a halt, other more essential ones are plugging away while adapting to a new normal.

Although certain fisheries can't operate as per usual during this time, seafood processors remain on the front lines to ready what they can for the market. In an industry that typically sees a large number of people in close proximity — and using their hands to boot — maintaining a tenable level of production has not been a walk in the park.

Where adaptation is key to moving forward successfully, one plant that has had a largely seamless transition is Cape Sable Island-based Xsealent Seafood Company. That said, the economic hit taken from COVID-19 is a main reason: The company is operating at 40% of its usual workforce, with senior employees still there but the total number hovering around 18 rather than the usual 40. President/Owner Terry Zinck says while Xsealent looked into having employees wear masks and other PPE, it was decided that those in particular did not need to be mandated. These days employees stay around nine feet apart, plus surgical masks are in use, as well as

gloves (light gauge). As live-lobster packers, Xsealent employees can better maintain distance. A shift procedure for lunchtimes is also in play, so those gatherings are kept to a minimum.

Another thing that helped Xsealent was recent building expansion. While the plan was to bring in more people, the current times dictated simply allowing more space for current employees. Where some plants are having trouble maintaining physical distancing, Xsealent's already-in-place protections, building expansion and unfortunate reduction of workers combined to create a safe situation for its own.

At the end of the day, everyone needs to put food on the table. For some, they do that by preparing food for others. Seafood plants, the industry as a whole and so many more worldwide are feeling the pinch of an economy decimated by a pandemic, but continue to go to work every day and do their best while risking their own health. For that, they should be commended. To all members of the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance, we thank you and are here for you. Together, we will get through this.

*continued from page 11*

being honest, sincere and transparent at all times.

The above attributes can be summed up into one word that auditors use, professionalism. If auditors are showing the above attributes, then they are considered to be acting in a professional manner.

With the auditor being a well-trained professional and plant management being committed to having a strong food-safety program that complies to the government and its third-party certification, Nova Scotia will continue to be known for its excellent seafood exports and consumers will benefit in having a safe food product on his/her table.

**Written by Freeman Libby and Tanya Van Buskirk, Ocean Agri-Food Solutions Ltd., [fclibby@gmail.com](mailto:fclibby@gmail.com) [Vanbuskirkte@gmail.com](mailto:Vanbuskirkte@gmail.com)**



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# The Lobster Council of Canada implementing “Long-term Value Strategy for the Canadian Lobster Sector”

**Geoff Irvine, Executive Director**

The Lobster Council of Canada (LCC) has been active during the first half of 2020 doing the foundational work of implementing a “Long-term Value Strategy for Canadian lobster”. This three-year marketing, market-intelligence and market-access strategy will provide lobster-focused educational information, recipe ideas, sector news and other information to help consumers and trade buyers domestically and worldwide make the best choice when thinking about premium protein for their family, restaurant or market: lobster from Canada!

With funding support from the Atlantic Fisheries Fund (90%) as well as LCC members and supporters (10%), this three-year strategy combines marketing and promotion activities, market-access advocacy and market intelligence for industry participants.

The LCC marketing committee and staff are working with trade marketing experts from Argyle Public Relations to support the implementation of the strategy. For the first year of the project, the focus is

on foundational activities. This includes redesigning the LCC website, implementing a focused social media strategy, the establishment of a Chef Ambassador program, development of trade materials and establishment of in-market expertise in Asia and Europe.

The LCC website is being adjusted to focus on the key attributes of the Canadian lobster brand. It will contain lobster recipes featuring raw tails, lobster meat, high-pressure processed lobster and live lobster. There will be information on handling/buying lobster and sector action on sustainability, traceability and food safety.

We will have educational videos, fact sheets and other information for consumers and trade buyers, while still providing important data and reports for the Canadian industry in a members-only section. The LCC social media strategy has been refined and will focus initially on the photograph-intensive platform Instagram (please follow us!), followed by work with the WeChat format focused on consumers and trade buyers in Asia. With the challenge posed by the pandemic, this year

we will focus social media content on the domestic market. We see a fantastic opportunity in targeting Canadians who are home, looking for new protein options and ways to support local industry.

The team will monitor the digital media landscape as it evolves during this time, as research has shown that consumers are looking to hear from brands for inspiration. Especially with younger consumers, new brand relationships established now are expected to grow into longer-term prospects. This is a great time to build affinity and demand for Canadian lobster while consumers are at home, something that can grow to foodservice as restaurant demand returns through the end of 2020 and into 2021.

The launch has started with organic posts highlighting the new look and feel, followed by a series of paid social advertisements targeting Canadians to drive awareness for Canadian lobster. It is important that internal lobster sector participants know that the marketing team is committed to ensuring communications represent all provinces and products, and this will be evident as the program develops. As is vital with social media promotion, monitoring for engagement and success will be closely monitored, and we will use that information to optimize future paid posts.

The LCC has been an active member of the federal/provincial “Seafood Sector Export Team” (SSET) that works together to invest in tradeshow activities around the world, marketing material development and communications, and other projects that promote seafood from Atlantic Canada. The SSET has invested in videos and other materials focused on chefs and trade buyers. The LCC has also produced ma-

terials focused on market-access issues including the Canadian lobster brand, North Atlantic right whale mitigation tactics, lobster care through the value chain and traceability. The “Long-term Value Strategy” will bring all of this together and develop a simplified suite of branded materials focused on the attributes of the Canadian lobster brand.

The Chef Ambassador program is focused on working with an Atlantic Canada-based chef to represent Canadian lobster at events, and with traditional and social media. The program also envisions providing training and support to chefs located around the world in key markets, who can represent Canadian lobster when cost and time does not allow travel or attendance.

Finally, in 2020 we will be finalizing the format for our market-intelligence information sharing segment of the strategy. We know that sharing market information to all participants in the lobster value chain is invaluable, to ensure that everyone hears the same message. During the pandemic, we have held several calls between Canadian trade commissioners based in Asia/Europe and LCC members (harvester groups, buyers/dealers, processors and live shippers) to ensure that everyone understands market recovery status and timing. Understanding how each party participates and shares the value is vital to a well-functioning value chain, and helps us project a positive message to our customers around the world as we encourage them to choose the highest quality premium protein in the world: Canadian lobster.

# Seafood Industry Outlook Persisting Despite COVID-19

Nova Scotia may be doing well when it comes to limiting the spread of COVID-19, but a significant chunk of the East Coast seafood industry has been struck hard by the pandemic.

It's a bleak picture if you compare the first half of 2020 to 2019. As those who make their living in this industry well know, many seafood prices have dropped — January was strong, but February launched a decline that still hasn't righted itself. Many businesses are being forced to get very creative with their business models in order to survive.

According to American market-analysis company Urner Barry, the price of a whole 10- to 12-pound Atlantic salmon dropped a whopping 44.6% between January and June of this year. Whole lobster prices aren't far behind, with a 42% price tag dip that brought the luxury food item down to \$5.51 per pound from a robust \$9.50 per pound in January.

This pricing landslide flies in the face of five years of promising growth in Canada's lobster industry. Lobster exports grew a compound average rate of 6.2% between 2015 and 2019, according to Statistics Canada data. 2019 was particularly rosy, when exports grew by 16.5% thanks to booming sales to China, brought on by the US-China trade war.

## Unprecedented times

Coronavirus — and its impact on whole lobster prices — first became an issue for Nova Scotia-based Tangier Lobster Company on January 24. It was 6 a.m. when a Shanghai client sent an urgent email that he needed a \$1 per pound reduction on the shipment they were about to pack and send to him. "I knew then that it was serious" says Stewart Lamont, Tangier Lobster's managing director, who also sits on the board of directors of the Nova Scotia Seafood Alliance. "He would never normally ask for a discount at the last minute like that."

The requested discount came at a time when Wuhan had just been locked down and the Chinese marketplace was suddenly slowing. "At first, it was the Asian marketplace — particularly China", says Lamont. "Then the slowdown went into Europe, then North America. And then it was within the four walls of our company."

Pandemic fallout in February and March made those months the toughest for Tangier Lobster. On February 1, the selling price of lobster was half of what it had been in January, and Canada had only reported its first case of coronavirus the week before. "Although we still had strong sales, price points were dramatically reduced" says Lamont, who has been exporting lobster from the rural Tangier community since the 80s.

While prices were falling, the company also had to prioritize keeping their employees healthy. Admittedly, they have a geographical advantage when it comes to social distancing: their company's the only inhabitant of a 29-acre property about 100 kilometres outside of Halifax. They also have a gate, so they can control who enters their work environment. They all wear masks and are social distancing wherever possible. Luckily, Nova Scotia's succeeding in its battle against the virus, and provincial restrictions are easing steadily. Now, Lamont's waiting for the food-service industry to rebound.

Around the world, the public gathering spaces that make up a large portion of seafood sales — bars, restaurants, cruise ships, casinos, hotels and more — have been shuttered by COVID-19, bringing on a staggering drop in worldwide consumption. Lamont estimates only 40 or 45% of the world seafood market has remained available to the industry.

When comparing March 2019 to March 2020, sales at Canadian restaurants plummeted by \$3 billion, according to Ipsos' Foodservice Monitor. But there are some positive developments: instead of sitting in a restaurant, people are ordering takeout or getting restaurant meals delivered. The new online sales model has exploded everywhere, including mainland China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Vietnam, and Lamont estimates online sales may have jumped as much as 10 times what they were last year: "We have friends in the restaurant trade who are doing very serious online activity".

## New business models

One Australian salmon farming and processing company, Huon Aquaculture, has had success with their online Shopify store, allowing them to interact directly with their end consumers. Shopify provides an "ultimate guide" called *How to Start a Food Business* that includes information such as the Canadian food-labeling requirements and a directory of Canadian food-packaging manufacturers. They also have ready-built design themes that are perfectly suited to the seafood industry.

Being creative with what you're offering your customers can also make a difference, says Edward Steeves, the regional vice-president of the Atlantic region at Export Development Canada. "Not only are people improving their own internal sales models and online sales platforms, they're

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also getting creative. They still offer their traditional commodity, but they're also increasing the value-add to their products to make them more appealing to the direct consumer — whether that's further processing or combining it with other products." Businesses like Huon are creating hampers that offer smoked fish, pate, and more.

One of the unexpected successes for Huon was from their "club", an email list of loyal customers. These seafood enthusiasts have done more than just given them steady sales — they've ended up driving more sales than Huon's social media efforts.

Connecting directly with end-use clients may mean keeping more money in your pocket compared to suppliers who use brokers, distributors and resellers. But it also comes with its own risks and extra work, according to the *Fishermen's Direct Marketing Manual*, put out by the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute. Of course, there are options to reduce that risk through your financial institution and Export Development Canada (EDC).

The seafood industry in Nova Scotia has generally been relieved to see that they can get help if they need it, says Lamont. "The government has stepped up, banks have stepped up and Export Development Canada has stepped up."

## **Help for pandemic challenges**

In the first few weeks of the pandemic, Export Development Canada (EDC) put together a brand-new credit program for companies selling within Canada or internationally. Called the EDC Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP) Guarantee,

it was designed to help address cash-flow challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To roll out the guarantee, EDC partnered with financial institutions across the country, helping Canadian business owners cover operating costs. EDC has also adjusted several of its financial solutions to reflect these tough times, implementing new measures that include deferring payments, increasing credit limits, committing to faster approval processes and more.

But there are other benefits to giving EDC a call. EDC has global representation in over 20 offices around the world, including many that are experiencing a growing demand for seafood. Seafood companies can use EDC to get on-the-ground information about opportunities for expansion into these new, profitable markets. "We can walk them through the nuances of various markets and leverage our relationship with Global Affairs Canada", says Steeves. Global Affairs offers a Trade Commissioner Service that can connect Canadian business owners with international trade shows and events, as well as share in-depth knowledge of international seafood markets.

Another financial resource for seafood businesses is the Government of Canada's Canadian Seafood Stabilization Fund, offering \$62.5 million to the fish and seafood processing sector to weather losses caused by COVID-19. For Nova Scotia and the rest of Atlantic Canada, the program's being managed by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA).

Lamont says he has a lot of empathy for seafood businesses that are experiencing

a cash-flow crunch. Early on in the pandemic, the company decided to close down anything that wasn't a "must" in order to minimize costs as much as possible. That meant initiatives that weren't directly tied to immediate sales were put on hold.

"We should be under no illusions that it's business as usual or life as usual. But so far, the lobster sector has survived it."

As global economies reopen, many businesses looking to recover and pivot to non-traditional business models that work in the "new normal" will turn to government resources and EDC for support. Learn more at [www.edc.ca/ns-businessrelief](http://www.edc.ca/ns-businessrelief).



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In this new facility, the largest of its kind north of Miami, cargo is moved from the refrigerated space to the aircraft in less than two minutes, a vital ingredient when shipping live lobster to the International Market.

Built due to the response in Canada's growing high value import and export business and all partners in the logistics chain, wanting to move goods to and from Canada, Northeastern United States and other International locations. It has become a critical component of the Atlantic Gateway here in Nova Scotia.



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## Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council

Our strength as an industry in Nova Scotia relies heavily on the ability to be responsive when times are tough, and the seafood sector is no stranger to this. With market fluctuations and labour challenges at play on a normal day, now we are faced with COVID-19.

The Nova Scotia Fisheries Sector Council (NSFSC) has established itself as the key fisheries human-resource and training organization in the province. Its work directly reflects the needs of employers and workers, and has contributed to major advances in labour force development and planning in Nova Scotia. Council activities focus on human-resource planning, attraction and retention, and industry capacity building and training.

As a province, Nova Scotia is now faced with trying to make sense of operating during a pandemic. As essential workers that provide a food source to Canadians and beyond, the seafood industry has

not missed a beat. What is needed is support for employers and workers to ensure they have the available resources to continue operation.

As a first step to helping support industry, the NSFSC took the lead in ensuring that facilities had the proper protocols to operate. Through a labour sub-committee, a document titled Safety Practices for Seafood Processing was developed. The document took into consideration advice from Public Health, and the Province of Nova Scotia. This is a best-practice guide to help support employers and workers prevent the scatter of COVID-19. It was accepted by Nova Scotia Department of Labour – Occupational Health and Safety division and Nova Scotia Public Health. Many employers have also put in their own protocols. The NSFSC document is a resource to ensure they have everything covered.

A second step undertaken by the NSFSC is to support assessment of opera-

tions and implementation of protocols. The industry is faced with the implementation of practices that were largely unfamiliar to them – creating social distancing when necessary, installing barriers, wearing additional personal protective equipment, adding additional handwashing stations, extra cleaning and sanitizing practices, and extra training on new protocols for their workers.

With these items in mind, there are two support programs that are being offered to industry: The Perennia Seafood COVID-19 Response Program is non-repayable, and will assist companies in purchasing PPE and other safety materials, and in developing new protocols and procedures to ensure safety of both seafood products and employees.

The second program is offered via Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME). Their approach is to assign a lead consultant who will act as a triage coordinator to identify unique business

challenges, and then pull in the consulting support required from their team that matches the needs of the client. This is a great opportunity for industry to either have help in assessing their operation to determine how workflow can be altered, and with implementing and customizing safety protocols, navigating through funding programs or sourcing PPE. The cost for these supports is free to the industry, which is made possible through support provided by Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education and Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

The third support that has been created to help support industry is a web portal developed by Grant Thornton, which encompasses relevant funding programs that are available to the industry. The NSFSC has recently launched a site dedicated to COVID-19. <https://www.nsfsc.ca/covid-19/> is one-stop shopping for all COVID-19 industry resources. As businesses continue to operate during these challenging times, they need to be aware of what supports are out there, what's specific to the sector and how they work. We are happy to provide this tool, and hope that it

eases the burden of sifting through various websites to gain necessary information.

As an industry that continues to operate during COVID-19, we hope that we can ease some of the pressure and offer the necessary

supports to make operating during the "new normal" a little easier.

**For further information on the programs listed or to stay informed on new programs, feel free to contact us.**

# COVID-19

## GET FINANCIAL RESOURCES FOR YOUR BUSINESS NOW

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Canada



# Things Have Changed! Cleaning and Sanitation for the Food Production Facility

**Lorne Piercey, CAEd.**

When you consider a well-managed “cleaning & sanitation program” it needs to be viewed not as a “necessary evil”, but as a vital part of production. An effective cleaning & sanitation program is directly related to the safety of your product and the ensured protection of your markets.

***“All I want is for the plant to not smell too bad”***

When I started my career with the industrial-sanitation industry almost 30 years ago, the above statement was part of one of the first conversations I had with a customer. This customer is a producer of seafood products. They were busy, and at the time considered the cleaning of the production operation as a necessary evil — that is to say, the cleaning process was something that had to be done to keep the smell down but it interfered with production, and production is what paid the bills.

At that time, at this location, all of what we consider today to be the “Bad Habits of Sanitation” were in full force; time constraints for the cleanup crew, lack of proper tools, lack of or incorrect chemical application equipment, too many different cleaning products and overuse of chemistry. On top of this there was no defined sanitation program, no staff training and no staff supervision.

But, the place didn’t smell too bad!

***How have things changed?***

The seafood industry has changed considerably in the last 30 years. With the ever-expanding international markets and the growing needs for RTE (ready-to-eat) products, the challenges of providing a safe product on an industrial scale increase by the day.

In addition to the requirements of provincial and federal agencies such as the Nova Scotia Department of Fisheries and the CFIA (Canadian Food Inspection Agency), there is the need to meet the policies and requirements of third-party audit agencies involved. Under the GFSI umbrella are agencies such as BRC (British Retail Consortium, now known as BRCS), Marks & Spencer, GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative), SQF (Safe Quality Food), BAP (Best Aquaculture Practices) and numerous others. To add further complication and challenge, the regulation requirements presented by government and third-party agencies seem to be in a constant state of change.

A surprise for a number of seafood processors is the amount of time and importance that a third-party auditor will allocate to reviewing and assessing the sanitation program

of a facility. For example, over a 3-4 day audit it is not unusual for the auditor to allocate 30-40% of the auditing time towards sanitation.

In addition, testing requirements have evolved well past the “all I want is for the plant to not smell too bad” measurement. Cleaning & sanitation results have to meet strict, pre-operation requirements through various testing protocols and methods. Visual inspections, ATP testing, bio-swabbing, bio-films detection and more recently allergen testing which requires evaluating cleaning results on the molecular level. This requires supporting and recording with documentation.  
*Every day!*

***Okay. So how does this effect my cleaning & sanitation requirements?***

As the market and regulatory changes have evolved the requirements for cleaning & sanitation have had to change as well. In fact, the approach has had a 180-degree about-face. 30 years ago my main role was to visit my customers, determine what chemicals they needed and acquire a purchase order. Today 70-80% of my time is de-

voted to providing them with effective education support.

***Okay, I think I have to make a change. Where do I look for help?***

If you need to improve on your existing sanitation program, you need to have

an honest conversation with your existing sanitation supplier. In most cases, any changes required can be corrected in short order. If you need to make a change in suppliers or need to develop a new sanitation program, you have to do your homework.



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Look to a supplier that specializes in the development and support of sanitation programs for the industrial food sector. A professional supplier will start with an audit of your facility, and based upon their findings be able to present you with alternatives and solutions.

A well-developed cleaning & sanitation program would cover but not be limited to:

- **Cleaning & sanitation procedures;**
- **Sanitation management systems software (such as the CEPS program);**
- **Optimization of costs;**
- **Documentation;**
- **Chemical handling & safety;**
- **Use and maintenance of dispensing/ application equipment;**
- **Correct, up-to-date multilingual workplace signage;**
- **The right tools for the job;**
- **A documented and mutually beneficial supply agreement with your sanitation supplier (a requirement for most third-party certifications);**
- **Effective and available sanitation training for your cleaning crew; and**
- **An effective, open and cooperative relationship with your sanitation supplier as a means of supply and support.**

Your main goal as a producer is to develop a sanitation program over which you have full ownership, one that effectively meets your needs and can be efficiently managed and maintained.

### **Conclusion**

Sani Marc Food & Beverage is committed to providing the seafood industry with all necessary information and support relative to the cleaning and sanitation, technological improvements, industry training and the processes implemented in cleaning and sanitizing.



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# COVID-19 Related Support for Nova Scotia's Seafood Industry

Nova Scotia's seafood industry has been urgently responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic by implementing operational changes, developing safety guidelines and installing infrastructure and equipment required to maintain business continuity while keeping employees and products safe.

The recently launched Perennia Seafood COVID-19 Response Program provides financial assistance to commercial entities in the fishing, aquaculture, marine plant harvesting and seafood buying/processing sector in Nova Scotia to support implementation and development of operational changes required to allow for business continuity and safe workplace practices needed as a result of ongoing COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions.

The fund assists companies in purchasing Personal Protective Equipment and other safety materials, and in developing new protocols and procedures to ensure safety of both seafood products and employees who are essential to maintaining operations. Approved applicants are eligible for 70% non-repayable funding assistance on total eligible project costs to a maximum of \$25,000 per licensed operation. Applicants must be in good standing with federal and provincial governments and must currently hold at least one valid buyer, processor, harvester, aquaculture or rockweed harvesting license or lease.

The following activities are eligible expenses under the program:

- Purchase and installation of signage, protective barriers to help achieve employee separation;
- Purchase of Personal Protective Equipment;
- Engineering or design costs to re-orient processing lines and workflows;
- Purchase and installation of equipment and technology needed to allow for continued employee productivity in light of processing line or workflow changes;
- Development of new work policies and procedures (incremental to regular business operations); and
- Training of employees on new work procedures.

Program applications can be submitted on an ongoing basis until the program funds have been committed or the program is closed. Approved applicants are required to submit a claim form and provide copies of all invoices, receipts and proof of payment for all eligible expenses. Application forms are available at: [www.perennia.ca/coronavirus](http://www.perennia.ca/coronavirus) or by contacting Helen Arenburg - [harenburg@perennia.ca](mailto:harenburg@perennia.ca), (902) 670-9572.

***For general inquiries about the program, please contact, Ashley Sprague - [asprague@perennia.ca](mailto:asprague@perennia.ca) (902)-955-0248.***

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