Aquaculture is the farming of aquatic organisms including fish, mollusks, crustaceans and aquatic plants. Farming implies some form of intervention in the rearing process to enhance production, such as regular stocking, feeding and ongoing protection from predators.

Aquaculture — also known as fish, shellfish or sea vegetable farming — is becoming an important method of meeting our global seafood needs. The U.S. imports more than $10 billion worth of seafood annually, much of which has been raised in ways that do not adhere to the FDA’s food safety guidelines.

New Hampshire has a strong fishing heritage and a working waterfront that dates back 400 years. However, local fishermen are struggling to retain their businesses in the face of high fuel costs and reduced catch quotas. Aquaculture offers a primary or secondary source of income for fishermen while providing a local, sustainable source of seafood for restaurants and fish markets.

New Hampshire currently has a diverse aquaculture industry ranging from fish hatcheries and bait fish ponds to marine shellfish, seaweed and finfish production in cages. Research and development projects through the University of New Hampshire, New Hampshire Sea Grant and GreatBay Aquaculture have helped lead the way for aquaculture expansion in the region. NHSG worked closely with local fishermen to train them on polyculture techniques — raising both mussels and steelhead trout on floating rafts in the Piscataqua River. Other species ready for production include oysters, mussels, kelp, steelhead trout, cod, black sea bass and striped bass.

Oyster aquaculture in New Hampshire’s Great Bay Estuary has recently expanded with more than six million shellfish in the nutrient-rich waters, comprising 13 oyster farms and numerous restoration sites of The Nature Conservancy. NHSG has worked with N.H. Fish and Game to help oyster farmers get their businesses started and ensure they have the proper permits to grow oysters without impacting the fragile bay ecology. New Hampshire brand oysters can now be found in restaurants from Portland, Maine, to Boston, Mass.

Through our aquaculture efforts and our collaboration with local fishermen and businesses, we are helping to improve seafood production and security for our region, providing employment, maintaining our working waterfronts and producing a healthy new source of protein while supporting healthy ocean populations and ecosystems.

www.seagrant.unh.edu/fisheriesaquaculture