

Sarah Corson photo  
Capt.  
Stefanie  
Alley, who  
has been  
running  
tours on her  
lobster boat  
since 2004,  
has figured  
out how to  
successfully  
continue to  
fish and  
operate  
a tourism  
business.



## Tourism: Business spin-off for sea farmers, lobstermen

"Oh yeah, sure. I know a bunch of lobstermen. Lots of times I'll just call up or go down to the boat to get a few lobsters," said any resident on the Maine coast, anywhere.

"You know a lobsterman? Oh man, that must be so cool, to go right down to the boat and get your lobsters! And Maine is such a beautiful place. I'd love to be able to go around the islands and stuff," replied any of the other 300 million residents of the United States.

And there you have it in a nutshell. In the midst of the increasingly important search for alternative income for seafood producers, meaning fishermen and sea farmers, there are untapped resources that might be good sources of revenue.

In this case, we're talking about tourism and the potential for clam diggers, oyster and mussel farmers, lobstermen, and others to find ways to earn some extra cash. In these ventures, stories and personal connections are the stock in trade and a potential source of significant profit.

Tourism opportunity in fishing and aquaculture was the subject of three workshops conducted along the Maine coast in December by the Maine Sea Grant Program, University of Maine



## New England Marine & Industrial

[www.newenglandmarine.com](http://www.newenglandmarine.com)

Serving the commercial fishing industry for over 40 years

### Polyform Norway

A Series Buoys  
HL Low Drag Buoys



### Polysteel Rope

Esterpro  
Hydropro  
Polysteel  
Sizes: 5/16" to 1/2"  
other sizes available by  
special order



### Spongex Buoys

We carry the full line  
of Spongex Buoys



### Stearns Safety Products



Including the new  
I950 24+ hour  
Immersion Suit

### Lobster Bands

Shedder Bands  
Printed Shedder Bands  
Cold Water Shedder Bands  
Printed Standard Bands  
Offshore Printed Bands

Best Quality, Variety and Pricing

### Trap Kits Aquamesh Cavatorta

Trap Kits can be special ordered  
with 10.5 or 12.5 gauge mesh in a  
variety of colors. We also have  
36" and 48" kits in stock in bundles  
of 50. Call for more information.

### 3 Convenient Locations:

Brant Rock, MA  
888-834-9301

Portsmouth, NH  
800-492-0779

Stonington, ME  
800-660-2692

- Volume Discounts Available
- Dealer Inquires Welcome
- Deliveries ME, MA, RI, CT, NH (select areas)

**Fishermen and sea farmers are virtual rock stars to those from the nation's interior and to people overseas.**

Cooperative Extension, the Lobster Institute, the Island Institute, and the Maine Aquaculture Association. The meetings, held in Belfast, Machias, and Portland, drew approximately 100 people from fishing, sea farming, tourism, agriculture, and economic development.

Trends in tourism show that tourists are looking for direct experiences – ways to connect to the places and people they are visiting. It's also clear that the knowledge and experiences of fishermen and aquaculturists are valuable commodities, as are the boats or farms that most visitors to the state don't typically have access to.

Farmers in the traditional agriculture community have been doing tours and other visitor-focused activities for years now, and finally the movement is extending to the salty side of things, too.

Capt. Stefanie Alley, a long-time lobsterman and poet out of Islesford, ME, has been running tours since 2004 and presented some of her experiences at the workshop in Machias.

Alley's tourism business has increased every year, and she now usually runs about six tours per week during the season. She noted that the personal connection and the information she has at hand truly is welcome and a main drawing point for visitors.

"The connections you make with people are really good," she said. "People are curious about how lobsters are caught, and they are just fascinated, always looking for the next buoy."

The fact that lobsters are featured on TV in different ways doesn't hurt either, Alley added.

"People see lobsters in the news and they want to find out more," she said. "Plus, people just really have a good time on a boat."

It took Alley a year or two to really mesh the schedules of fishing and tourism to her satisfaction and, since she does all her own scheduling, she figured out how to make it work.

"I can leave early to go haul, then come back and sell the catch, and then run a tour or two in the afternoon," she explained.

### Aquaculture tours

Those in the aquaculture world have had some success in the tourism profession as well. There are many examples of farms that work frequently with tour boats, kayaking groups, or outfitters on an informal basis, as well as some that have gotten more organized about it.

Hog Island Oyster Co. of Marshall, CA has made oyster farm tourism a main part of its business. Here in the Northeast, the leader has been Island Creek Oyster Co. of Duxbury, MA. Island Creek President Chris Sherman spoke at the Portland meeting and gave the audience a fascinating look at his company's tourism opportunities.

"While farm tours and the like are not a core business for Island Creek, hospitality is, through service to our retail and chef customers and at our restaurants in

Boston. So, it's only natural that we would open our doors and try to show people a good time," Sherman said.

At Island Creek, the entire farming process is on display from the nursery and upwellers all the way through packaging. The important part is having the visitor get that firsthand experience of the process, the product, and the environment.

The company's premier tourism opportunity is dinner in the Oysterplex, a floating raft that doubles as a fresh-

air dining room. Visitors willingly pay \$1,000 for up to eight people for the experience.

Even though it's a spendy affair, it's a chance to rub shoulders with some of the heroes of the oyster-growing business and to have a meal in a place that's sure to be well remembered.

"The farm is the beating heart of our brand, so tours and other events are a powerful outreach platform for the rest of our business," Sherman said. "It's also a great way to leverage the site, equipment, and personnel for what has become a meaningful revenue stream during off times in the summer weeks. More importantly, we have a lot of fun doing it!"

### Seafood rock stars

Just remember: For people who live on the coast, knowing a lobsterman, a clam digger, or an oyster farmer is pretty run-of-the-mill, but those same fishermen and sea farmers are virtual rock stars to those from the nation's interior and to people overseas.

For Natalie Springuel, an extension associate with Maine Sea Grant, the opportunities for seafood and tourism match up well judging by her long experience with the tourism

industry and coastal communities.

"Visitors these days are really into the personal experience. They don't want to sit around. They want to do something," she said.

"It's all about getting that firsthand experience and coming home with a great memory," Springuel continued. "Fortunately for us, Mainers are really well known for having a lot of expertise, wonderful humor, and for being connected to the natural environment. Visitors want to share in that."

**Trends in tourism show that tourists are looking for direct experiences – ways to connect to the places and people they are visiting.**



Island Creek Oyster Company photo

In addition to a farm tour, Island Creek Oyster Company offers dinner in the Oysterplex, a floating raft where visitors pay \$1,000 for the dining experience.

### Business sense

As with any venture, there can be risks. Personal injury and liability, as well as minimizing damage to equipment or the aquaculture crop, including things like biosecurity and invasive species, are all important issues that need to be taken seriously and thought through.

The December workshops addressed those issues through research done by Scott Gunst, a practicing maritime lawyer, registered captain, and former law student at the University of Rhode Island Sea Grant Law Center.

Fortunately, through a careful review of the various risks, good insurance coverage, and legal advice, operators can be well protected both from legal challenges and the various dangers that can arise when working

with tour visitors.

To learn more or review the materials presented at the workshops, visit the Maine Sea Grant website at <[www.seagrant.umaine.edu/fisheries-tourism](http://www.seagrant.umaine.edu/fisheries-tourism)>. There, you'll also find a full set of easy-to-use fact sheets to help you get started. They cover topics from how to use your lobster license in the tourist trade to maritime law, liability, and insurance to the essentials of what makes an engaging tourist experience.

Dana Morse

Dana Morse is a Maine Sea Grant marine extension associate based at the Darling Marine Center in Walpole, ME. You can reach him by phone at (207) 563-8186 or by e-mail at <[dana.morse@maine.edu](mailto:dana.morse@maine.edu)>.

## North East Safety Training Company

*"I had never put on a survival suit. I never knew how flares worked. I never learned how to launch a life raft until today. Thank you. I already feel safer." ~ Fisherman after completing NESTCo safety training*

If you're not conducting monthly safety drills, will you be able to defend yourself in court if something goes wrong? When an emergency strikes your boat you want to be ready. Properly training your crew reduces response time, insures effective action and eliminates doubts as to what to do.

◆ Monthly INSTRUCTION is given to each individual on board, in accordance with 46 CFR 28.270, on where to go, what

to bring and what to do for fire, man-overboard, unintentional flooding and abandon ship emergencies.

◆ Each safety effort is fully documented and this documentation is provided to both the vessel captain and owner.

◆ A comprehensive vessel survey is done to itemize safety equipment, alarm systems, detection systems, and watertight/weathertight closures.

### DRILL CONDUCTOR CLASSES OFFERED

ONE DAY CLASS (10 – 12 HRS.)

**CLASS DATES:** April 17th  
May 16th  
June 6th      **CLASS LOCATION:** OFFICE  
*(BRING SURVIVAL SUIT)*

**COST:**  
\$250.00 / PERSON

- DRILL CONDUCTOR CERTIFICATION PROVIDED
- AMSEA APPROVED COURSE
- CALL OR EMAIL TO SCHEDULE PREFERABLY A WEEK PRIOR TO CLASS DATE.



**NESTCo.**

Capt. Fred Mattera

55 State St., Narragansett RI 02882

(401) 284-0025 • fm@nestco.necoxmail.com



COASTAL  
ENTERPRISES  
INC.



### Maine's Working Waterfront Access Protection Program

#### Attention Waterfront Property Owners

New applications are invited for an early May deadline for cash awards to protect coastal Maine properties that support commercial fishing activities.

For York, Cumberland, Sagadahoc & Lincoln County  
Contact Hugh Cowperthwaite 535-2920 or [hsc@ceimaine.org](mailto:hsc@ceimaine.org)

For Knox, Waldo, Hancock & Washington County  
Contact Dick Clime 882-5191 or [rdc@ceimaine.org](mailto:rdc@ceimaine.org)