

Cultivating Prosperity: FocusMaine Releases A Strategic Plan for Growing Maine's Food Economy

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PORTLAND, ME, UNITED STATES, December 12, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- FocusMaine has unveiled Cultivating Prosperity: A Strategic Plan for Growing Maine's Food Economy. Based on stakeholder input and robust economic research conducted by Camoin Associates, this plan dives deep into the current landscape and charts an ambitious path forward for Maine's agriculture, aquaculture, and value-added food and beverage production sectors—industries poised to drive job creation and revenue growth across the state.

FocusMaine aims to propel the state into the national spotlight as a top supplier of high-quality food products, serving both local and out-of-state markets by harnessing Maine's natural advantages and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem. The comprehensive report features a Literature Review, a Situational Assessment, and an Action Framework tailored to capitalize on Maine's strengths and emerging trends in the food industry.

"If you can't measure a problem, it's tough to determine the progress you're making in solving it. That's why having the data to make informed decisions is key for organizations across Maine to work together as they become leaders in the national food supply chain while providing healthy foods to our community right here at home," said Senator King. "Through this Congressionally-Directed Spending that Senator Collins and I secured in the FY2022 spending bill, FocusMaine's Food Action Plan will help move Maine's food economy forward as a national leader. I look forward to seeing the economic impact of this work and the additional quality jobs that it will create statewide for Maine people."

Starting in October 2023, FocusMaine, with support from Camoin Associates, engaged with stakeholders from non-profits, businesses, government, and academia through interviews, forums, and a high-impact workshop. As a result of this collaborative process, the report envisions Maine taking the lead on key trends that matter to both businesses and consumers by strengthening business technical assistance programs, improving access to financial support, addressing workforce training and attraction gaps in the food system, promoting cooperative models, expanding production and storage facilities across the state, and leveraging technology to drive growth and innovation in the sector.

While the action plan's primary purpose is to guide FocusMaine's partnerships and programming, FocusMaine invites any organization to explore the strategic action plan and find ways to collaborate. Whether through direct partnerships or independent projects, others are encouraged to reach out to discuss the strategic implementation of the recommendations outlined in the report.

"Between 2017 and 2022, Maine lost 564 farms and over 82,000 acres of farmland—a 7.4% decrease. This alarming trend highlights the urgent need to support our farms and strengthen Maine's food economy," said Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, a member of the House Agriculture Committee and Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee. "The Food Action Plan, developed through FocusMaine's forum series and engagement efforts, is a comprehensive and impactful resource that brought together diverse voices from the private, public, and non-profit sectors. It will be instrumental in charting a path toward a thriving food economy in Maine. As my colleagues and I continue to debate the Farm Bill, I am committed to advocating for federal policies that bolster Maine's agricultural sector and ensure its long-term growth and sustainability."

Supported by a Congressionally Designated Spending award from the Small Business Administration, this report and its related engagement sessions mark a critical step toward a thriving, sustainable Food Economy for Maine.

Read the full report here <https://focusmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Final-Report-Food-Economy-FocusMaine-3-1.pdf>

About FocusMaine:

FocusMaine is a dynamic, data-driven, private sector-led initiative collaborating with influential leaders to accelerate the growth of high-potential industries, creating quality jobs and shaping a future-ready economy. Over the past six years, the growth of FocusMaine sectors, the Food Economy and Bioeconomy, outpaced Maine's overall growth. FocusMaine catalyzed over 1,200 jobs, including 577 jobs in companies participating in their programs which created an additional 618 indirect jobs, generating \$261.7 million in sales revenue and \$71 million in earnings.

Over the past year, job growth in food companies participating in FocusMaine programs was twice as high as job growth in Maine's overall food sector, and six times as high as job growth in Maine's overall economy. www.focusmaine.org

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FAQ

What are some of the key findings from the report?

- In 2023, the Food Economy's 15 industries supported 23,191 jobs in Maine, accounting for approximately 3% of the state's total jobs.
- Leading & Emerging Industries
- Leading: Bakeries & Tortilla Manufacturing, Sugar & Confectionary Product Manufacturing, Beverage Manufacturing, Fishing, and Crop Production are leading industries in the Food Economy.
- Emerging: Animal Production* & Grain and Oilseed Milling
- The demand for cold storage facilities has increased. While some space is available, cold storage facilities are concentrated in Southern Maine. Additional cold storage space is needed across the entire state to increase value-added processing capacity.
- There is limited space available for new processing plants. Prioritizing the redevelopment of current industrial properties will present new growth opportunities.

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