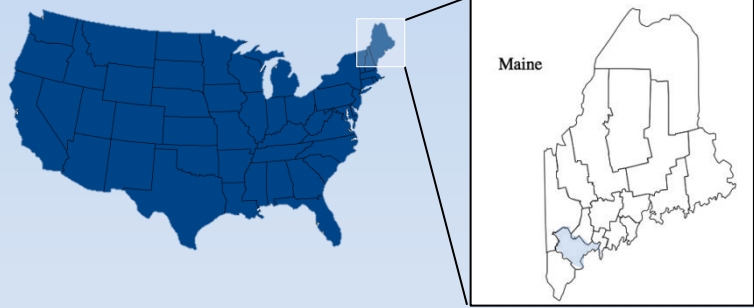


Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership

Greater Portland Sustainable Food Production Cluster Manufacturing Community



The Community

With over 60 businesses and 1,800 jobs, the Portland region accounts for 31% of Maine's food manufacturing employment. In addition, hundreds of entrepreneurs operate licensed home businesses from kitchens, basements, and barns. The region is rumored to house more breweries per capita than anywhere else in the country, outside of San Francisco. Led by the Greater Portland Council of Governments, the community is upgrading its port and improving the transportation and distribution efficiency of its supply chains to grow its lead in sustainable food production.

The Vision

To build on its strong advantages in food production, the Greater Portland region has crafted a strategy to grow its food processing sector while increasing the region's sustainability. As part of this strategy, the region will expand support for food processing start-ups, redevelop brownfields, leverage a growing renewable energy sector, and utilize technology to more efficiently connect farms with processors and processors with markets to reduce food waste.

The Strategy

Workforce and Training: The food processing sector has three primary skills needs: industrial engineering, food science, and food preparation. Eleven colleges in the region currently help prepare the region's food processing workforce. However, the region has two workforce challenges: preparing for impending retirements and integrating recently resettled refugees into the workforce. The Greater Portland region will expand a rapid 10-week training program, piloted as Mobilize Maine, to prepare workers in fields ranging from food safety and inspection to logistics. The region will better support a multicultural workforce through English classes and hiring drives for new Mainers.

Supplier Networks: Existing initiatives focus on expanding the use of technologies like covered hydroponics and greenhouses and on providing shared marketing for a coalition of seafood processors committed to reducing the ecological impacts of their products. However, challenges including food wastage through misaligned incentives, lack of processing capacity in certain categories, and a reluctance to aggregate product from small producers prevent the development of more sustainable supply chains. To address these challenges, the region will create a cooperative purchasing program to aggregate volumes from producers and develop an IT solution to minimize supply chain waste.

Research and Innovation: Most of the state's research capacity in food production is located elsewhere in the state, the exceptions being the University of New England and the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. However, the region does have strong private sector research underway in sustainable food production. The Greater Portland region proposes linking its public research with this private research through the Greater Portland Sustainable Food Production Cluster research initiative. In addition, the region proposes to leverage funding from the Maine Technology Institute to commercialize new product research by the region's start-ups and businesses.

Infrastructure and Site Development: For the first time since 1980, the region has refrigerated container service to Europe enabling food exports. However, the port in question lacks a direct rail connection, requiring costly over land transport. And despite rail and air connections, 90% of shipments originating in Maine travel entirely by truck. In addition, the city does not have sufficient cold storage to prepare product for long-range transport. The region has proposed building a 100,000 food warehouse at the port. In addition, the region has proposed restoring rail service on the Mountain Division rail line to connect the port to rail and reduce the need for overland trucking.

Trade and Investment: Established in 1996, the Maine International Trade Center (MITC) is Maine's leading source for international business assistance, including counseling and lead generation. Through trade missions to Europe, Latin America, and Asia, MITC offers global exposure to Maine's small and medium-sized businesses. A continuum of business assistance is critical for the start-up and expansion of food-related enterprises, including incubation, business counseling, financing, and manufacturing support. While many of these services are already in place, the system can benefit from better marketing, coordination, and integration.

Operational Improvement and Capital Access: To help connect food entrepreneurs with financing avenues, the region plans to create a Start-Up weekend in Portland where businesses would have opportunities to pitch their ideas to multiple funders in lightning rounds. In addition, the Greater Portland region would like to bring a program called InsYght to Portland to help entrepreneurs navigate available resources. Developed in Michigan, InsYght diagnoses an entrepreneur's needs through a battery of 20 questions and connects the entrepreneur to resources in its database based on those needs.

The Partnership

Workforce Providers: Southern Maine Community College, Coastal Counties Workforce Inc. **Manufacturing Supplier Network:** University of Southern Maine, Maine Food Strategy, Jordan's Farm **Research and Development:** Gulf of Maine Research Institute, University of New England **Infrastructure/Site Development:** Maine Port Authority, Maine Sustainable Agricultural Society, City of Portland **Trade and International Investment:** Maine International Trade Center, Maine Office of U.S. Department of Commerce Export Assistance Center **Operational Improvement and Capital Access:** Coastal Enterprises Inc., Axiom Technologies, Maine Community