

FISHERIES & AQUACULTURE

NEWS

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FOOD AUTONOMY: A SENSIBLE CHOICE FOR ALL OF QUÉBEC

The fishing season is well underway, and I'm happy to see Québec fish and seafood on our tables—delicious products caught, raised and prepared here!

On May 25 and 26, I met for the second time with the Biofood Policy partners and we took stock of its implementation. These two days were filled with rich discussions. In particular, we talked about my government's desire to increase Québec's food self-sufficiency, while maintaining our trade. I really enjoyed our discussions and I hope that the partners came away as satisfied as I was.

As you may have noticed, food self-sufficiency plays a major role in our government's decisions and this subject was also discussed at length with Biofood Policy partners at our annual meeting. This is a government priority and is fully part of Québec's economic recovery. The fisheries and aquaculture sector is contributing to this ambitious goal. It has already started to do so by offering consumers a wide variety of fish and seafood of unequalled quality and freshness, always with a growing concern for eco-responsibility.

As I have pointed out on several occasions, identifying Québec fishery and aquaculture products is essential to help consumers find and choose them, as is the traceability system to help them confirm the origin of their purchases. This will help increase the visibility of our products. It is therefore imperative to speed up progress on this issue.

While crab fishing began in March and lobster fishing is winding down, shrimp processing plants in Gaspésie began operations in early June. I am pleased with the outcome of the situation under the joint plan for Québec shrimp fishers, because this is an important economic activity for the region.



Minister of Agriculture,
Fisheries, and Food

ANDRÉ LAMONTAGNE

Keep up the good work this season, and hopefully it will be as productive as the previous ones. The commercial fisheries and aquaculture sector must also take advantage of consumer enthusiasm for buying Québec products!

I wish you a wonderful summer filled with abundance and good judgement.

ECO-SCORE LABEL: AN ADVANTAGEOUS RATING SYSTEM FOR OUR AQUATIC PRODUCTS?

By Jérémie Persant,
from the Direction de l'Innovation

Environmental awareness is growing strong in the general population. And this trend is only spreading. In France, with the new *Anti-waste Law for the Circular Economy* in February 2020, this environmental awareness is now backed by legislation. Since this law also extends to the food industry, it is driving new labelling initiatives to inform consumers about the environmental repercussions of food products. One such initiative is the eco-score.

Although this label is not yet available on the market in Québec or Canada, it is reasonable to expect it to appear in the medium term. We know that, among animal proteins, aquatic products get the best scores in terms of environmental repercussions (Fisheries & Aquaculture News, April-May 2021), and some already have Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification, or Ocean Wise certification in Québec. This label could serve as an additional marketing tool.

In more practical terms, this label can illustrate environmental impact in a simple way by assigning products a grade from A to E. An A grade is assigned to food products with the lowest levels of repercussions and, inversely, an E grade is assigned to products with the greatest impact. This grade takes a number of different factors into consideration, including packaging, origin, method of production and the presence of special ingredients that can have repercussions on biodiversity and ecosystems. With its intuitive grading system, the label helps inform consumers about the choices they make in a simple way.



**Low impact
on the environment**

**High impact
on the environment**

However simple, this grading system is not universally lauded, particularly because of how certain factors are weighted in it. This weighting can give these factors a greater or lesser influence on the overall grade. For example, an organic certification can garner more points, even though, according to some observers, the organic production model can require greater surface area to produce the same quantity of food. This can fuel debate about certain production models and also call the grading system into question. Even though it does not satisfy every stakeholder, however, the eco-score does have one advantage: it opens a pathway. This initiative will also be debated in France's parliament for the purpose of deciding on a universal, recognized grading system.

ALIMENTS DU QUÉBEC: A KEY PARTNER IN HELPING QUÉBECERS CHOOSE LOCAL AQUATIC PRODUCTS

By **Michel Bélanger**, from the Direction des analyses et des politiques des pêches et de l'aquaculture

Nowadays, Québec consumers are increasingly choosing local products for reasons of ethics, trust, and the high quality of these products. In order to be able to choose local fish and seafood, consumers must be able to distinguish, at the point of sale, between aquatic products fished or farmed in Québec, and other products. To that end, Aliments du Québec is a key partner of the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec (MAPAQ) in identifying and promoting Québec biofood products.

Founded in 1996 by the members of the Quebec Agri-food Sector, Aliments du Québec is a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the agri-food industry through the "Aliments du Québec" and "Aliments préparés au Québec" brands and their respective derivatives.

To pass the verification process and earn "Aliments du Québec" certification, the product must be made up of at least 85% ingredients of Québec origin, provided all of the main ingredients come from Québec. In addition, all processing and packaging must be done in Québec.

The Québec fish and seafood sector is well represented within the organization. The province currently boasts 50 aquatic products with "Aliments du Québec" certification. They include a wide range of freshwater caught fish, rainbow trout, Northern shrimp, oysters and, of course, Gaspésian lobster bearing its famous medallion. Jean-Paul Gagné, the executive director of the Association québécoise de l'industrie de la pêche [Québec Fishing Industry Association] (AQIP), is also vice chairman of the Aliments du Québec board of directors.

The "Aliments du Québec" certification is especially unique because it raises visibility, offers competitive pricing, and brings recognition on the Québec market.

This strategy has actually been adopted by some major stores, which feature shelves of products bearing the "Aliments du Québec" logo. In addition, various promotion initiatives help the Québec population benefit from a widely-recognized and popular brand image. There are a number of opportunities for visibility. They include marketing collaborations, even directly on the Aliments du Québec website, media sponsorships, and a special program for restaurants and institutions ("Aliments du Québec au menu").

For consumers, the "Aliments du Québec" brand is a guarantee of the product origin. Aliments du Québec's verification process gathers information on ingredients, where they come from, and availability in Québec and corroborates it through reliable sources and experts.

By helping consumers buy local, the "Aliments du Québec" brand plays a very important role in increasing Québec's food autonomy. This is why MAPAQ supports the organization financially, so that it can run advertising campaigns and in-store promotions.

Identifying and promoting Québec aquatic products in the Québec market is part of the Ministère's 2018-2025 Action Plan to develop the commercial fishing and aquaculture industry. The identification of aquatic products, in collaboration with Aliments du Québec, is just one way we work to increase the value of Québec products purchased in Québec.

To learn more about Aliments du Québec, visit the website:

www.alimentsduquebec.com/en/.

Or, you can contact the organization directly at:

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BRINGING MORE AND MORE NEWCOMERS ON BOARD

By **Danielle Bouchard**,

from the Direction régionale de la Gaspésie

Stakeholders in the harvesting sector have often indicated that securing the next generation of industry workers is a major issue. The fishing industry needs to face its ageing workforce. In Québec's maritime regions, nearly 55% of fishers are over age 50, and those under age 40 account for just over 13% of the total.

This is a particularly difficult challenge given the broader demographic decline and labour shortage that the maritime regions are facing already.

Young people who want to enter the harvesting sector face major hurdles related to the costs of acquiring a company. Because assets in the fishing industry are so high in value, young people are forced to invest more capital to get started.

It is critical to bring new fishers into the harvesting sector if we are to ensure the future of the fishing industry, and that's why MAPAQ has made this one of its priorities in its 2018-2025 Ministerial Action Plan for the Fishing and Aquaculture Industry. For example, since 2018, the Ministère has doubled the amount that may be invested in the next generation. This figure rose from \$25,000 to \$50,000 for those under 45 as part of the program to support those purchasing their first commercial fishing business, Soutien à l'achat d'une première entreprise de pêche commerciale.

This helped make the 2020-2021 year particularly successful in terms of bringing newcomers into the harvesting sector. MAPAQ granted a total of \$1.3M in financial assistance for the next generation to support 28 projects.

In addition, some newcomers to the sector have attracted media attention. One such example is the first and only female captain/owner/operator with a snow crab license in eastern Canada, who is a Quebecer. In addition, 2 of the 28 newcomer projects that received financial support from MAPAQ in 2020-2021 were led by women. A number of young entrepreneurs also took over family businesses in all sectors, despite the context of tremendous challenges. MAPAQ is proud to highlight its major contribution in support of the next generation in this sector, and wishes it nothing but success.

OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES IN THE COMMERCIAL FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE SECTOR IN 2020-2021

By **Michelle Parent**, from the Direction régionale de la Gaspésie

The interventions below focus on six main areas in the 2018-2025 Ministerial Action Plan for the Fishing and Aquaculture Industry.

HARVESTING

- Number of measures: **28**.
Total of \$1.3M in financial assistance provided for the next generation
- Number of measures in the form of loan guarantees: **99**.
This is a total of \$63.8M

AQUATIC PRODUCT PROCESSING

- Projects done: **26**
- Total investments: **\$17.4M**
- Total financial assistance: **\$4.4M**

AQUACULTURE

- Projects done: **11**
- Total investments: **\$4.5M**
- Total financial assistance: **\$1.5M**

MARKETING

- Projects done: **1**
- Total investments: **\$140,000**
- Total financial assistance: **\$112,000**

INNOVATION

- New research and development projects implemented with a focus on innovation: **10**
- Total investments: **\$1.4M**
- Total financial assistance: **\$926,000**

CONSULTATION WITH SECTOR STAKEHOLDERS

- Projects implemented: **5**
- Total investments: **\$603,000**
- Total financial assistance: **\$342,000**

IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT

- Jobs created and secured: **530**

The sector has earned its dynamic reputation with 191 interventions in 2020-2021, for \$73.2M in financial assistance from MAPAQ and \$87M in total investments. For the purpose of comparison, in 2019-2020 there were 163 interventions, \$59.7M in assistance from MAPAQ and \$80.2M in total investments.

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE CENTRE FOR INNOVATION, A MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

By **Jérémie Persant**,
from the Direction de l'innovation

Good news for the fisheries and aquaculture sector. On April 8, Ministers Proulx, Lamontagne and Fitzgibbon announced the construction of the Grande-Rivière Centre for Innovation in Aquaculture and Fisheries. The goal of this roughly \$17M project is to build new facilities for the Merinov Grande-Rivière site.

The General Manager, Mr. David Courtemanche, announced that the Centre for Innovation will bring together researchers, students and industry stakeholders in one place and will create greater synergy in all stages from sea to consumer's plate. In real terms, this new space for innovation will establish the following five new technology platforms:

- design workshops and equipment design for sustainable fisheries;
- a fish farming room with modern technologies for effluent treatment;

- damp and microalga labs for the farming of new species of algae, for the production of sustainable aquaculture feed, and for the long-term preservation of crustaceans;
- a pilot micro-plant for the enhancement of algae and marine coproducts;
- ecophysiology and advanced biology labs.

With this new location, Merinov expects to not only launch new research projects, but to also establish an entrepreneur-in-residence program.

Supported financially by the Ministry of Economy and Innovation as well as the Desjardins Group, this project will also revive the Carrefour national de l'aquaculture et des pêches (CANAP) whose activities were discontinued in 2010. As a matter of fact, this building, which belongs to MAPAQ, was made available to the project through a forty year lease. This lease also includes a set of nearby lands and buildings.

Start of work is planned for summer 2022. Over time, establishing the Centre for Innovation will create twenty jobs and consolidate thirty. As a result, the local economy will be stimulated, research and innovation efforts to benefit the fisheries sector will increase.

This project will follow the history of the Grande-Rivière which, for the past 85 years is one of the centres of research and innovation for Quebec's fisheries sector. In fact, in 1936,

the Gaspésie Experimental Fishing Station was built on these sites, an organization then under the responsibility of the federal government. Then, we see in parallel, the Station biologique de l'Université Laval (1939) which was transferred to the Quebec government in 1950. With this event, the research adventure of the Quebec government for the fisheries sector begins. The centre will be renamed the Grande-Rivière Marine Biology Station. This tumultuous history, interspersed with other name changes (CAMGR in 1990) and the creation of organizations (Halieutec in 1983), will continue until the founding of Merinov in 2010, thanks to the concerted efforts of MAPAQ, Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles, and UQAR.

Of course, research and innovation is an eventful history. The fact remains that this history continues to demonstrate its liveliness, especially with the creation of the centre in question. We wish this initiative success and prosperity.

Acknowledgements: Julie Boyer (personal communication); Lucien Poirier (Summary of the History of Quebec Government Fisheries Research – January 1992).

SPIRULINA: QUÉBEC'S NEW AQUACULTURE PRODUCT

By **Marie Lionard**,
from the Direction régionale de la Côte-Nord

Les Jardins secrets d'Océane, a company based in Mani-Utenam, near Sept-Îles, is planning to diversify its market gardening activities into commercial spirulina farming. With this move, Les Jardins secrets d'Océane will become not just the first Indigenous aquaculture company in Québec, but also the first Québec company to offer spirulina.

Spirulina is microscopic algae (*Arthrospira platensis*). Its common name comes from its spiral shape. This microalgae is recognized and valued for its many nutritional benefits (rich in protein; essential amino acids; omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids; carbohydrates; vitamins B12, C, A, D and E; minerals and trace minerals). Spirulina has also been used for many years to help fight malnutrition. Although it can be consumed directly in the form of a food supplement, it can also be added to processed products like smoothies or fruit roll-ups.

The company's plan includes building greenhouses to produce spirulina in ponds. It also includes purchasing equipment to farm, harvest, process, package in bags and market top quality spirulina in the form of flakes.

The company expects to start building new facilities this spring. We are eagerly awaiting the arrival of this first Québec spirulina product on the market so that we can finally taste its benefits!

The Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec is pleased to support this new production through the Development Support program and the Québec Fishing Fund (QFF) program. The QFF is funded jointly by the Government of Canada and the Government of Québec. This project also receives support from the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, the Native Commercial Credit Corporation, the Sept-Rivières RCM and the Côte-Nord Community Futures Development Corporation.

2021 TRAP LAUNCH IN THE MAGDALEN ISLANDS

By **Karine Villemaire**,
from the Direction régionale des Îles-de-la-Madeleine

Once again this year, the organizers of the activities surrounding the traditional trap launches on the Magdalen Islands showed creativity and ingenuity in promoting the start of the 146th trap fishing season. On May 7 and 8, the Fondation Willie-Déraspe foundation's team and its partners were able to share the excitement and frenzy that was very much present on the various wharves of the Madelinot archipelago, the day before the lobster season opener.

With a mainly virtual approach thanks to new technologies and social networks, trap launch highlights included the Rendez-vous des travailleurs de la mer [Marine Workers' Gathering], as well as the radio and web program simultaneously broadcast from various archipelago docks before and during the grand departure. This year, Sister Amabilis Deveau, a prominent figure in the Magdalen Islands known for bringing people together, agreed to come keep watch during the grand departure.

As it does every year, the event attracted local and national media attention. Since the public health situation made it impossible to attend the event in person, the Ministre de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec, André Lamontagne, took part in a radio interview on CFIM, the Magdalen Islands radio station. He took the opportunity to highlight the importance of collaboration between the federal and provincial governments, both in terms of activities in the sector and in terms of project funding, mentioning the Québec Fisheries Fund as an example. The Ministre also wished all fishermen and fisherwomen a safe, healthy and enjoyable 2021 season.

On May 8, at 5:00 a.m., as is tradition, flares were set off as a signal for the grand departure. With that signal, the 325 lobster vessels from the Magdalen Islands left the various wharves of the archipelago to launch their traps. During the first week of the season, the fishermen and fisherwomen could take part in a photo contest by submitting a photo including a lobster that had just been caught. Photos and videos from the event are available on the Facebook page "La mer sur un plateau." It's quite a sight to see!

The mission of the Fondation Willie-Déraspe is to promote awareness of marine resources and seafaring professions while highlighting the maritime way of life. The Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation is pleased to provide financial support for the activities organized for the 2021 Trap Launch, which showcases the fisheries sector.