



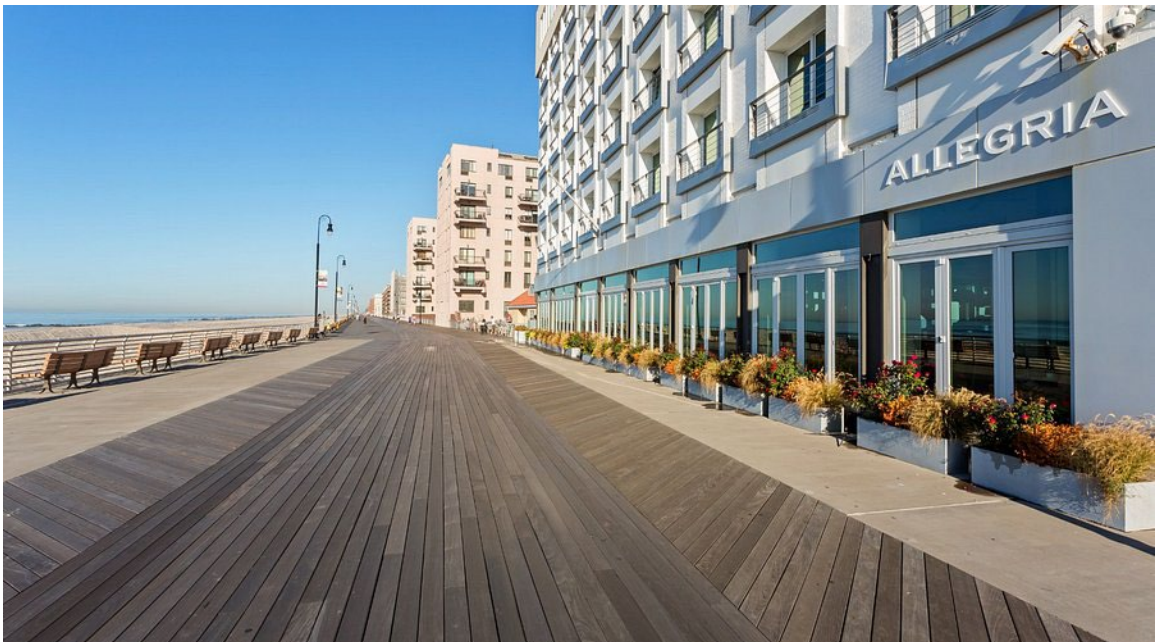
Agenda and Abstract Booklet

Aquatic Foods Conference 2026: New York

Wednesday, May 20, 2026, 8:00 – 8:00 PM EST

[Allegria Hotel, 80 W Broadway, Long Beach, NY 11561](#)

Grand Ballroom, Second Floor



HOSTED BY:





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Agenda

8:00 AM Registration Opens

8:00 AM **Breakfast Buffet (provided)**

9:15 AM Welcome, Introductions, and Housekeeping

9:30 AM **Agency Updates**

- US Food and Drug Administration
Karen Swajian, Consumer Safety Officer
 - US Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency
Ana Mirem Villamil, County Executive Director
 - USDC NOAA Fisheries, National Seafood Inspection Laboratory
Jon Bell, Director
 - NYS Department of Environmental Conservation
Martin Gary, Director of the Division of Marine Resources
 - NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
Joshua Perry, Seafood Coordinator
-

10:30 AM Introduction to the Fulton Fish Market Cooperative
Nicole Ackerina, CEO

10:50 AM AI in Seafood Processing
Dr. Yiming Feng, Virginia Tech

11:10 AM Atarraya, AI-Enabled Shrimp Production (Virtual)
Daniel Russek, CEO

11:30 AM **Break and Poster Session**

From Invasive Species to Resource: Valorization Pathways for Green Crab (*Carcinus maenas*) in Maine
Mya Griffith

Development of a Rapid, Non-Invasive, and Low-Cost DNA-Based Method for Sex Determination in Russian Sturgeon using Swab Sampling
Alona Chepiha, Vladimir Chouljenko, Greg Bolton, and Alexander Chouljenko



12:00 PM	Seaweed Food Safety Guidance and Training Initiatives <i>Michael Ciaramella</i>
12:20 PM	Designing an Expert-Supervised, Multi-Format AI Learning Platform for Blue Catfish Awareness and Sustainable Seafood Education <i>Lizhou Cao and Chengchu Liu</i>
12:40 PM	Novel Post-Harvest Processing Techniques for Enhancing Safety and Quality of Aquatic Foods <i>Gulsun Akdemir Evrendilek</i>
1:00 PM	Buffet Lunch (provided)
2:00 PM	Development of Cell-Cultured Fishmeal Using a Fish-Derived Scaffold for Aquaculture Feed <i>Rose Omidvar</i>
2:20 PM	U.S. Aquaculture Producers' Adoption Intentions Toward Cell-Based Fishmeal: A Segmentation Analysis Using Behavioral Theory <i>Rose Omidvar</i>
2:40 PM	The Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) and the Future of Interoperable Digital Traceability <i>Kevin Edwards and Huw Thomas</i>
3:00 PM	100% Fish: Global Innovation, Commercialization, and Ecosystem Development <i>Angee Hunt and Christina A. Mireles</i>
3:25 PM	Supporting a Sustainable Industry: Louisiana Alligator Recovery, Production, and Food Safety Research <i>Evelyn Watts</i>
3:45 PM	Break
4:00 PM	AFC Business Meeting – All are welcome!
5:00 PM	Adjourn
6:00 PM	Pizza and Oysters (provided) at Barrier Brewing Long Beach



Speaker Bios

Karen Swajian

Consumer Safety Officer, US Food and Drug Administration

Karen Swajian serves as a Consumer Safety Officer with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, where she supports regulatory and compliance activities to protect public health. Her work focuses on ensuring that FDA-regulated products meet federal safety and quality standards.

Ana Mirem Villamil

County Executive Director, USDA Farm Service Agency

Ana Mirem Villamil is the County Executive Director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency. She works closely with local agricultural producers to administer USDA programs and provide technical and financial assistance that supports resilient farming and food systems.

Dr. Jon Bell

Director, National Seafood Inspection Laboratory, NOAA Fisheries

Jon Bell is Director of the National Seafood Inspection Laboratory with NOAA Fisheries. He leads national efforts related to seafood inspection, quality assurance, and laboratory science, supporting export certification, consumer protection, and confidence in U.S. seafood products.

Martin Gary

Director, Division of Marine Resources, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Martin Gary serves as Director of the Division of Marine Resources at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. He oversees programs focused on the conservation, management, and sustainable use of New York's marine and coastal resources.



Joshua Perry

Seafood Coordinator, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets

Joshua Perry is the Seafood Coordinator for the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. In this role, he works to strengthen New York's seafood industry by supporting market development, community engagement, and coordination across state and industry partners.

Nicole Ackerina

Chief Executive Officer, Fulton Fish Market Cooperative

Nicole Ackerina is CEO of the Fulton Fish Market Cooperative, one of the largest seafood distribution hubs in the world. She leads initiatives focused on modernizing operations, supporting wholesale businesses, and ensuring a safe, efficient, and resilient seafood supply chain.

Dr. Yiming Feng

Virginia Tech

Dr. Yiming Feng is a researcher at Virginia Tech whose work focuses on innovative technologies and systems relevant to food, agriculture, and sustainable production. His research contributes to advancing efficiency, safety, and environmental performance in food systems.

Daniel Russek

Chief Executive Officer, Atarraya

Daniel Russek is CEO of Atarraya, a technology company specializing in sustainable aquaculture systems. He leads the development of innovative shrimp farming solutions designed to improve productivity, biosecurity, and environmental sustainability.



Abstracts

POSTER: From Invasive Species to Resource: Valorization Pathways for Green Crab (*Carcinus maenas*) in Maine

Mya Griffith¹, Mary Parks², Gulsun Akdemir Evrendilek¹

¹University of Maine Cooperative Extension – Food Safety and Seafood Technology, Orono, ME

²Green Crab Project, Gulf of Maine Research Institute, Portland, ME

The European green crab (*Carcinus maenas*) is a highly invasive species that has caused substantial ecological and economic damage along the northeastern United States, particularly in the Gulf of Maine. Its predatory behavior has contributed to the decline of commercially important shellfish populations and the degradation of critical coastal habitats, including eelgrass beds and soft-shell clam flats. While these impacts are well established, the species also presents an opportunity for resource recovery through innovative utilization strategies.

This study examines the potential to valorize green crab biomass into value-added products that support Maine's emerging blue economy. Both food and non-food applications are considered, including the development of seafood products as well as the use of crab-derived materials in animal feed, fertilizers, and other bioproducts. Processing approaches and food safety considerations are evaluated to identify scalable and economically viable pathways for commercialization while ensuring product quality and consumer protection.

Reframing green crab from an ecological liability to a sustainable resource, this work demonstrates how invasive species management can be integrated with seafood innovation, circular bioeconomy principles, and coastal economic development. The alignment of harvesting, processing technologies, and market strategies has the potential to generate new industry opportunities while contributing to ecosystem resilience in Maine.

Keywords:

Invasive species; *Carcinus maenas*; green crab; valorization; blue economy



POSTER: Development of a Rapid, Non-Invasive, and Low-Cost DNA-Based Method for Sex Determination in Russian Sturgeon using Swab Sampling

Alona Chepiha^a, Vladimir Chouljenko^b, Greg Bolton^a, and Alexander Chouljenko^a

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Early sex determination remains a major challenge in Russian sturgeon (*Acipenser gueldenstaedtii*) aquaculture, directly affecting caviar production efficiency and farm profitability. Sturgeons lack external sexual dimorphism, and conventional methods such as ultrasound and biopsy are labor-intensive, invasive, and unreliable at early developmental stages, typically applicable only to fish older than 5–6 years. The objective of this study was to evaluate a non-invasive, PCR-based method for sex identification in both adult (≥ 5 years) and juvenile (6 months) Russian sturgeon using mucus-derived DNA. Mucus samples were collected from gills, oral cavity, and lateral surfaces, and analyzed using a multiplex PCR approach combining the female-specific AllWSex2 primer with the species-specific Ag49 internal control primers. The sampling site had a significant impact on DNA quality and diagnostic accuracy. Swabs from the gills and mouth yielded the highest DNA concentrations and the most reliable amplification results, whereas samples from the lateral surfaces showed poorer results due to the easier potential contamination. As a result of optimizing PCR conditions, it was determined that 30 cycles of PCR is optimal, providing a balance between sensitivity and specificity. The method demonstrated high concordance with ultrasound-based sex determination in adult fish ($\geq 90\%$) and successfully identified sex in juveniles as young as 6 months. This non-invasive approach can facilitate early stock separation, improve feeding and management strategies, and reduce the costs of rearing unproductive males. Overall, the proposed method is a scalable and cost-effective tool that may enhance productivity, animal welfare, and sustainability in sturgeon aquaculture production systems.



Seaweed Food Safety Guidance and Training Initiatives

Michael Ciaramella¹, Jennifer Perry², Amanda Shore³, Anoushka Concepcion⁴, Indu Upadhyaya⁵, Zachary Gordon⁴, Catherine Janasie⁶, Christina DeWitt⁷, Razieh Farzad⁸, Brian Himelbloom⁹

New York Sea Grant¹ (mc2544@cornell.edu), University of Maine², Farmingdale State College³, Connecticut Sea Grant⁴, University of Connecticut Extension⁵, The University of Mississippi⁶, Oregon State University⁷, Florida Sea Grant, University of Florida⁸, University of Alaska Fairbanks – Kodiak⁹

Rapid advances in seaweed aquaculture, combined with increasing recognition of seaweed's nutritional value, sustainability benefits, and culinary versatility, have driven growth in domestic production and diversification of seaweed-based food products in the United States. As with all foods, seaweed products present potential food safety risks throughout cultivation, harvest, processing, and distribution. However, because seaweed remains a relatively novel food commodity in the U.S. market, regulators and industry face a lack of seaweed-specific food safety requirements and consistent national guidance.

To address this gap and support the safe expansion of the sector, a comprehensive Seaweed Food Safety Guidance document was developed to assist regulators, producers, processors, and retailers in identifying, evaluating, and managing key food safety hazards associated with seaweed products. The guidance synthesizes existing national and international publications, scientific research, and regulatory frameworks into a flexible resource that accommodates diverse species, production environments, and regulatory frameworks.

As domestic seaweed aquaculture continues to expand, this guidance serves as a tool to promote safe practices, facilitate regulatory compliance, and strengthen consumer confidence while supporting sustainable food production and economic growth within coastal communities. The document is intended to serve as a foundation for the development of a formal, seaweed-specific food safety training program.



Designing an Expert-Supervised, Multi-Format AI Learning Platform for Blue Catfish Awareness and Sustainable Seafood Education

Lizhou Cao¹, Chengchu Liu², Beryl Malomo¹, Sagar Patel¹, Yixiao Ma¹, Jaden Hanson¹, and Devika Paranjpe¹

¹ Dept. of Computer Science and Engineering Technology, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, MD

² Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program, University of Maryland, College Park, MD

Presenters: Lizhou Cao (lcao@umes.edu) and Chengchu Liu (cathyliu@umd.edu)

Blue catfish (*Ictalurus furcatus*) is an invasive species that has become well established in the Chesapeake Bay and Mid-Atlantic region. Originally introduced into Virginia's James and Rappahannock rivers in the 1970s for recreational fishing, blue catfish has since expanded rapidly and now preys on a range of important native species (i.e. blue crab, striped bass, American shad, menhaden, yellow perch, clam, and mussel). Recognizing both the ecological impacts of blue catfish and its value as a seafood resource, we developed educational programs to increase public awareness and promote invasive species mitigation through its harvest and consumption. Although artificial intelligence (AI) offers promising new opportunities for educational outreach, AI-generated information may be inaccurate or inappropriate for diverse audiences without careful expert oversight. To address this challenge, our multidisciplinary team of extension educators, seafood and environmental specialists, and computer technologists developed an expert-supervised, AI-powered, multi-format educational platform focused on blue catfish awareness and sustainable seafood education. Our goal is to create practical, adaptable tools that make science-based outreach more engaging, accessible, and relevant to a wide range of learners. In this presentation, we share both the educational materials we developed and our experience using emerging technologies to strengthen audience engagement, improve science communication, and extend learning beyond one-time events. By combining expert-reviewed content with interactive web modules, AI-guided conversations, educational media, and game-based learning tools, we aim to engage youth, adults, and community audiences in more meaningful and effective ways.



Novel Post-Harvest Processing Techniques for Enhancing Safety and Quality of Aquatic Foods

Gulsun Akdemir Evrendilek¹ and Mya Griffith¹

¹University of Maine, Cooperative Extension / Food Safety and Seafood Technology, Orono, Maine, USA

Aquatic foods are highly perishable due to rapid microbial growth, enzymatic degradation, and lipid oxidation following harvest. Conventional preservation practices such as icing and freezing are widely used but may not sufficiently maintain product quality and safety during extended storage and distribution. Emerging post-harvest processing technologies offer promising alternatives for improving shelf life while preserving the sensory and nutritional properties of seafood products.

Novel non-thermal and minimal-processing techniques—including high-pressure processing (HPP), cold plasma, pulsed light, and ultraviolet-C (UV-C) irradiation—have demonstrated effective microbial inactivation against common seafood spoilage organisms and foodborne pathogens such as *Listeria monocytogenes* and *Vibrio* spp., while minimizing thermal damage to delicate aquatic tissues. Complementary preservation strategies such as superchilling, slurry ice systems, and modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) further slow biochemical deterioration and extend product shelf life.

In addition, advanced monitoring technologies including hyperspectral imaging and biosensor-based detection systems are increasingly used for rapid, non-destructive evaluation of seafood freshness and quality throughout the supply chain. The integration of innovative processing and monitoring technologies presents new opportunities to improve seafood safety, quality control, and sustainability in modern aquatic food systems.

Keywords:

Aquatic foods; post-harvest processing; high-pressure processing; superchilling; non-thermal technologies; seafood safety; shelf-life extension



U.S. Aquaculture Producers' Adoption Intentions Toward Cell-Based Fishmeal: A Segmentation Analysis Using Behavioral Theory

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² Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA

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Declining availability of forage fish has intensified the search for sustainable aquafeed alternatives. One emerging innovation is cell-based fishmeal, produced from cultured fish muscle cells, which has the potential to reduce dependence on wild-caught fishmeal in farmed seafood production. This study examines heterogeneity in adoption intentions toward cell-based fishmeal among aquaculture producers in the United States. Using a structured questionnaire grounded in the Decomposed Theory of Planned Behavior and Diffusion of Innovation frameworks, data were collected from U.S. aquafarmers. Cluster analysis was employed to segment respondents based on their adoption-related perceptions and intentions. Results reveal two distinct producer segments with markedly different attitudes and willingness to adopt the technology. The adoption-ready cluster was dominated by younger farmers who perceived stronger economic advantages, greater compatibility with existing practices, higher ease of use, and stronger perceived behavioral control, while also recognizing environmental and social benefits. In contrast, a more skeptical cluster, largely composed of older producers, assigned low importance to innovation attributes and expressed neutral to negative perceptions regarding usefulness, compatibility, and controllability, with concerns centered on feed cost, performance uncertainty, and limited familiarity with cell-cultured technologies. This study contributes to the understanding of behavioral drivers behind the adoption of sustainable aquafeed technologies and provides practical insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and extension services seeking to accelerate the transition to more sustainable aquaculture systems.



Development of Cell-Cultured Fishmeal Using a Fish-Derived Scaffold for Aquaculture Feed

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Aquaculture relies heavily on fishmeal produced from wild-caught fish. This dependence increases pressure on fisheries and contributes to rising costs and unstable supply. Many alternative protein sources such as plant, insect, and microbial proteins exist; however they often show inconsistent nutrition, limited digestibility, and scaling challenges. Cell-cultured fishmeal offers a more natural alternative. It closely matches traditional fishmeal composition, allowing better control over quality, safety, and contamination. It is also expected to support long-term sustainability. This project focuses on developing a food-grade scaffold to support fish cell growth for feed applications. The scaffold provides structural support and promotes cell attachment while mimicking the extracellular matrix and allowing nutrient transport through a porous structure. The material is made from fish gelatin and hydrolyzed collagen sourced from seafood byproducts. These inputs improve sustainability and regulatory acceptance. Transglutaminase is used to crosslink the scaffold and improve mechanical stability. The enzyme is non-toxic and already used in food applications. We evaluated scaffold properties such as morphology, porosity, pore size, compression strength, degradation, and digestibility. After sufficient cell growth, cultured biomass will replace 5%, 10%, and 15% of traditional fishmeal in experimental diets. An eight-week feeding trial with tilapia will measure growth, feed conversion, survival, and health. Additional analyses will include feed digestibility and fillet composition. This study will assess the feasibility of cell-cultured fishmeal as a sustainable aquaculture feed ingredient.



The Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) and the Future of Interoperable Digital Traceability

Mr. Kevin Edwards and Mr. Huw Thomas, Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability

The Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) is a not-for-profit, public-benefit organization created to accelerate the global shift toward interoperable, digital seafood traceability. GDST convenes industry, civil society, and technology leaders to build and continuously evolve a common, practical, and globally applicable framework for capturing and exchanging key data across seafood supply chains. The GDST Standards—open, free, and vendor-neutral—enable interoperability across diverse digital systems, reduce the cost and complexity of compliance, and support responsible, transparent seafood production and trade.

Today, GDST is supported by more than 120 partners worldwide, including global retailers, seafood brands, processors, logistics providers, technology companies, NGOs, and industry associations. These stakeholders recognize that standardized and verified data flows are essential to reducing fraud, enabling regulatory compliance, strengthening ESG reporting, and addressing environmental, labor, and quality risks across global seafood value chains.

Investors aligned with the FAIRR Initiative have also identified adoption and implementation of the GDST Standards as a critical indicator of responsible corporate practice, signaling growing financial-sector expectations for digital traceability. Governments and multilaterals have increasingly echoed this alignment: The US FDA's *New Era of Smarter Food Safety* – The #1 core element is *Tech-enabled Traceability*; Indonesia's STELINA traceability platform integrates the GDST Standard, while the EU Fisheries Control Regulation cites GDST as a best-practice model. The FAO and the UN Transparency Protocol further reinforce GDST's role in setting internationally recognized benchmarks for interoperable traceability.

We will explore how GDST's collaborative model, expanding community, and globally harmonized approach are reshaping the future of trustworthy seafood data exchange—and why interoperable digital traceability must become a cornerstone of responsible seafood production and trade in the USA.



100% Fish: Global Innovation, Commercialization, and Ecosystem Development

Angee Hunt, Assistant Professor

Christina A. Mireles DeWitt, Professor

Oregon State University/Coastal Oregon Marine Experiment Station-Astoria

Seafood Expo Global in Barcelona and Iceland Innovation Week in Reykjavik provided complementary perspectives on the evolving global movement toward “100% Fish” utilization. While Iceland Innovation Week emphasized ecosystem-level collaboration, Seafood Expo Global demonstrated how these concepts are being commercialized.

Observations from Seafood Expo Global highlighted a strong shift toward positioning recovered materials as premium ingredients, functional food components, and other novel retail products instead of discarded as “waste”. Innovations in automated processing, AI-assisted grading, rapid microbial detection, traceability systems, and chilled meat recovery technologies illustrated how advances in engineering and quality management are also supporting higher-value utilization pathways. In addition, packaging and branding strategies reflected changing market approaches to emphasize transparency, convenience, sustainability, and premium product identity.

Following Seafood Expo Global, Oregon State University led an 18-person Oregon delegation representing ports, economic development, fishing, processing, tourism, and research sectors to attend Iceland Innovation Week in Reykjavik. Convened by the Iceland Ocean Cluster, delegates were provided immersive exposure to Iceland’s internationally recognized “100% Fish” initiative through site visits, expert panels, and cross-sector dialogue with organizations including Matis, Marel, Lysi, Kerecis, and the Iceland Ocean Cluster Ecobusiness Innovation Park.

Collectively, these experiences suggested that successful implementation of “100% Fish” approaches depend not only on maximizing utilization but on developing a market-driven ecosystem that integrates technology, culinary innovation, marketing, and cross-sector collaboration to create economically viable and consumer-accepted seafood products and industries.



Supporting a Sustainable Industry: Louisiana Alligator Recovery, Production, and Food Safety Research

Evelyn Watts, Louisiana Sea Grant, LSU

Introduction: The Louisiana alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) is widely recognized as one of the world's most successful wildlife conservation and recovery stories. Science-based management transformed the species from near extirpation to a sustainable, renewable natural resource supporting both wild harvest and farm-raised production systems. As hide values have declined, meat production has become increasingly important to the economic viability of the alligator industry.

Purpose: This project aims to generate updated, production-relevant meat yield data for Louisiana alligators and to contextualize these findings within current harvesting, processing, and food safety practices.

Methods: Standardized measurement protocols were developed to evaluate whole-chilled weight, carcass weight, and total meat yield for farm-raised and wild-caught alligators. Farm-raised alligators were classified by belly size, while wild alligators were categorized by total length to reflect industry practices. Meat yields were calculated as whole-to-carcass, whole-to-meat, and carcass-to-meat percentages. Sampling was conducted in collaboration with alligator farms and processors using commercial processing conditions to ensure industry relevance.

Results: Preliminary results from farm-raised alligators demonstrated mean whole-to-meat yields ranging from approximately 30–33% for medium and large size classes. Carcass-to-meat yields averaged 52–55%, substantially lower than values reported in widely cited 1981 studies. Yield variability was observed across size classes and production units, highlighting the importance of standardized methods. Updated length-to-weight and belly-size relationships were also established. These findings reflect modern production systems, improved chilling, and current fabrication practices.

Significance: Updated meat yield data are essential for accurate economic valuation, policy development, and industry benchmarking. This work supports informed decision-making across conservation management, production efficiency, and alligator food safety research.

Keywords: Louisiana alligator; sustainable wildlife management; meat yield; aquaculture; wild harvest; food safety; value-added protein; processing efficiency.



AFC Business Meeting Agenda

Financial Update

- Overview of total finances
- Proposed or recent changes to the financial structure

Organizational Updates

- Nonprofit restructuring status
- AFC host rotation update and timeline

Executive Committee Nominations and Elections

- Chair – Mike
- Incoming Chair – Alex >
- Past Chair – Evelyn > Mike
- Secretary – Alex
- Treasurer - Katheryn
- Website Coordinator – Razieh
- At-large Member – Taozhu
- At-large Member – Gulsun
- Abstract Coordinator – Vacant
- Student Liaison – Rose
- Other? i.e. sponsorship?
 - Fundraising – research Fund

Advisory Board Review and Nominations

- Alabama (Gulf) – Gregory Whitis
- Connecticut (Atlantic) - Vacant
- Delaware (Atlantic) – Ed Hale
- Florida (Atlantic and Gulf) – Christ Briggs
- Georgia (Atlantic) – Tori Stivers (retired)
- Louisiana (Gulf) – Jon Bell
- Maine (Atlantic) – Denise Skonberg (retired)
- Maryland (Atlantic) – Cathy Liu
- Massachusetts (Atlantic) – Margaret Malkoski (retired)



- Mississippi (Gulf) – Courtney Crist
- New Hampshire (Atlantic) - Vacant
- New Jersey (Atlantic) – Kevin Edwards
- New York (Atlantic) – Steve Frattini
- North Carolina (Atlantic) – Reza Tahergorabi
- Rhode Island (Atlantic) – Nicole Richard
- South Carolina (Atlantic) – Julie Davis
- Texas (Gulf) – David Williams
- Vermont - Vacant
- Virginia (Atlantic) – Jonathan Van Senten
- Washington DC – Karen Swajian
- Canada (Atlantic) – Cameron Prince

AFC 2027 Teaser



AFC 2027

AFC 2027 will be hosted by North Carolina
State University



For more information and questions contact
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