



Photo provided by
Keith Butterfield

SOCIAL LICENSE FOR MAINE SHELLFISH AND SEAWEED FARMING INFOGRAPHIC SERIES:

Getting Started

This series is brought to you by the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center in collaboration with thirty Maine shellfish and seaweed farmers who shared insight into practical ways of earning community support.

Securing a lease site is one of the first major hurdles when starting an aquaculture operation. While it's important to find a site with the right growing conditions, the social landscape can be equally as important to your success. Farmers pointed out how it's essential to get to know the community you want to site in, find out what is important to them, and think about how (and if) your operation would fit in. Having a sense of whether stakeholders would be supportive of your site ahead of time can save a lot of time and money down the road.

FARMER ADVICE: SLO STEPS IN SITING YOUR FARM

Step 1. Determine your stakeholders

Cast a wide net when determining your stakeholder network. Neglecting groups, whether intentional or not, can be detrimental to gaining a community's trust [1]. Identifying stakeholders is easier when you are from the community you are siting in. If you are "from away" as Mainers say, farmers offer two ways of learning the social landscape of your community: organic integration, and using gatekeepers.

ORGANIC INTEGRATION

- work in the industry or related industries locally before starting your farm
- get to know people over time
- gain credibility and respect through related work prior to farming

GATEKEEPERS

- connect with folks who are already integrated into the working waterfront
- ask them for guidance on building your network
- farmers reported that other aquaculture farmers, harbor masters, and fishermen were most helpful

While being from away doesn't preclude someone from out of town to getting involved if it's something they want to pursue... but they'd have to just take some extra steps in the beginning to get to know the community.

-Bob, seaweed farmer

Step 2. Stakeholder outreach

Reach out to your stakeholders BEFORE any formal notices are sent out. It's important to establish the line of communication early, so that if community members have questions, they can approach you directly. This reduces the spread of misinformation and prevents community members from feeling like plans were made without their input. Perceptions of procedural fairness, or whether community members feel as though they were adequately consulted in the leasing process, is important to

building social license [2,3]. Though flying under the radar is tempting, it is not worth the risk. Social license requires active support, so you want the public informed and aware.

Farmers used several strategies for outreach depending on who they were trying to connect with. For riparian landowners, some farmers would go door-to-door. They would provide materials including information on their project (and aquaculture more broadly), visuals of how the site would look, and contact information. Others would reach out using letters. This was especially the case when farmers needed to reach seasonal landowners during the winter. Tell your story, be transparent with your plans, and show that you are thinking about how your operation will affect them.

A lot of people think you're successful if no one shows up, but in my opinion, I think it's a success when everybody shows up and is in support and aware of what you're doing.

-Amanda, oyster farmer

Step 3. Two-way communication

It's important to show you are listening, rather than just informing stakeholders of your plans. Never be dismissive of stakeholder concerns, even if you feel that they are unwarranted.

Responding to concerns and making reasonable accommodations can help generate trust with stakeholders. Changes made based on public input is tangible evidence that you care about other users and are going to be a good neighbor. For example, Bob, a seaweed farmer, talked about how he switched to pyramid anchors so he could pull everything out in the offseason in response to concerns from the local lobstering community. He said "it's a significant investment in all the anchors and lines," but it is worthwhile because it "keeps everybody happy." Luckily, Bob's boat was already rigged so that he was able to make that accommodation, but even small changes can make a big difference. This all depends on your farm, your capacity to make adjustments, and what matters to your local community.

Photo provided by Dan Devereaux

For more insight into dealing with stakeholder conflict, scan this code.

References

- [1] Thomson, I. and R. G. Boutilier. 2011. Social license to operate. In P. Darling (Ed.), SME Mining Engineering Handbook (pp. 1779-1796). Littleton, CO: Society for Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration.
- [2] Moffat, K. and A. Zhang. 2014. "The paths to social license to operate: An integrative model explaining community acceptance of mining." Resources Policy. 39:61-70.
- [3] Mercer-Mapstone, Lucy, Will Rifkin, Winnifred R. Louis, Kieren Moffat. 2018. "Company-community dialogue build relationships, fairness, and trust leading to social acceptance of Australian mining developments." Journal of Cleaner Production. 183(2018): 671-677.