



New Seafood Business Accelerator to provide valuable food business supports

Inaugural program targets small-scale harvesters in promoting innovation and sustainability



West Coast Wild Scallops CSI Image

COURTENAY, 9 January 2023 – A new Seafood Business Accelerator program (SBA), led by the [Centre for Seafood Innovation](#) at Vancouver Island University and in partnership with the [BC Commercial Fishing Caucus](#), will help self-employed fishers and farmers become more self-sufficient business and community food providers, with funding support from Island Coastal Economic Trust's [Capital and Innovation Program](#).

The debut program will provide an intensive, seafood specific, four-month training to help 20 small-scale seafood harvesters (including wild harvest fish, shellfish, and seaweed and farmed shellfish) find their niche within the global food system. The initiative will include early business stage coaching, food industry training and project implementation services – all considered vital support to help harvesters seek new avenues of differentiation.

"Small-scale harvesters have huge socio-economic importance in B.C.'s coastal communities and their inability to compete has led to a declining number of harvesters," says Debra Hellbach, Manager of Vancouver Island University's Centre for Seafood Innovation. "This reality has had a major impact on the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous rural and remote coastal communities where they are based. Our new program endeavours to address this issue with practical support."

There are an estimated 1900–2000 small-scale harvesters in the province, many of whom need to innovate their products to stand apart from their foreign competitors. But the lack of business support and coaching has meant that many do not know where or how to start this process in a globally competitive marketplace. Coupled with the growing consumer demand for transparency in the food



system, raised awareness of supply chain fragility, and the importance of supporting local, the SBA comes at a pivotal time for the seafood sector.

“There is tremendous opportunity in the seafood sector with growth expected to double over the next 25 years,” says Debra. “At the same time, there is low consumption here in Canada due, in part, to lack of preparation knowledge and limited access to Canadian harvests. Our program aims to enable seafood entrepreneurs to tap into the growing demand for seafood through innovation.”

Participants of the training will take part in workshops and webinars focused on food industry training, coaching, business advice and implementation services. During the expert in residence portion, the focus will be on product development, marketing, financing or other participant needs. By the end of the four-months, all 20 participants will have a completed innovation plan and a product or marketing system prototype to present to potential buyers or other interested parties. As a bonus, the SBA includes a workforce attraction component where students from a variety of faculties will be invited to observe and assist throughout the program.

“This Seafood Business Accelerator program is an exciting initiative that will provide complete and lifelong business skills for the small-scale harvesters,” says Island Coastal Economic Trust Board Chair Aaron Stone. “We are honoured to be part of such a valuable effort that will have profound economic ripple effects in coastal communities and also help establish new business relationships that last well into the future.”

The Seafood Business Accelerator program is supported through the Innovation Support funding stream of the [Capital and Innovation Program](#). The Trust will contribute \$60,000 to a total project budget of \$186,225. The project is expected to get underway shortly.

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[About Island Coastal Economic Trust](#)

Founded by the Province of British Columbia in 2006, the Island Coastal Economic Trust works to build a sustainable and resilient coastal economy in reciprocal relationships with First Nations, municipalities, and regional districts across Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast, and islands and inlets from the Salish Sea to Cape Caution. Serving over half a million residents, we partner with communities in the development and financing of their economic infrastructure and diversification efforts through our unique structure that is led by, and accountable to, communities.

Since our inception, Island Coastal Economic Trust has approved more than \$58 million to economic development initiatives that have attracted over \$308 million in new investment to our region. These investments have created over 2,750 permanent jobs, and countless positive impacts, across the coast.

Island Coastal Economic Trust acknowledges that we work for communities across the ancestral and unceded territories of the Kwak'waka, Nuučaan' uɿ, Éyá7juuthem, Ligwilda'xw, Pəntl'áč, shishálh, Hul'q'umi'num', diitiid?aatx, SENĆOŦEN, Lekwungen, and T'Sou-ke speaking peoples.

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