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Sea Grant ensures safe seafood, preventing illness and saving consumers millions

By Peg Van Patten, *Connecticut SeaGrant*

The nation's \$60 billion seafood industry employs about 250,000 workers, and the U.S. is the third largest consumer of seafood in the world. To ensure seafood safety, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) established strict regulations for handling seafood in 1997. These regulations required all seafood processors to undergo training in the principles of **Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point** (HACCP).

Sea Grant programs around the nation provided standardized **HACCP training** that help businesses comply with FDA requirements and stay in operation. The HACCP programs teach seafood processors, dealers, importers, and inspectors to identify potential biological, chemical, and physical food safety hazards and help them develop plans to control these hazards. This protects consumers by ensuring that all domestic and imported seafood products are processed in the safest manner possible. This training has also been used to design or renovate seafood processing plants to optimize sanitation and efficiency.

Dr. Jim Murray, Deputy Director of Sea Grant, sees other advantages to the program. "HACCP is a great example of an intergovernmental partnership with industry and academia. Through the Sea Grant HACCP program, we've provided seafood safety training to about 90 % of all US seafood processing firms."

Seafood safety inspectors, health professionals, seafood retailers, and students interested in seafood careers have also benefitted from Sea Grant's seafood safety training. Improvements in seafood safety also mean higher quality products for consumers. In Louisiana, two cease-and-desist orders were dropped after the seafood processors completed training and prepared their HACCP plans. Because HACCP-like principles are being adopted by other nations, processors in the Great Lakes region have been enabled to enter new markets overseas.



Image: Alaska Sea Grant

"Since 1997, Sea Grant HACCP training has been an integral step to ensure a safe seafood supply in the U.S." says Murray. Having seafood processed under HACCP gives consumers a sense of confidence in the product which aids marketing. With the help of **Alaska Sea Grant** HACCP training, two new salmon businesses were started. Over the past three years, **Michigan Sea Grant** has facilitated the development of a whitefish marketing cooperative, and all the participating businesses are HACCP practitioners. **Virginia Sea Grant** offered HACCP training in both the English and Spanish languages. **New York Sea Grant** has taken a lead role in national providing online training in HACCP. Aquaculture and baitfish industries have applied HACCP principles voluntarily to also prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that the seafood HACCP program has prevented

between 20,000 and 60,000 seafood-related illnesses a year, translating into savings of about \$155 million annually. Surveys show that businesses with HACCP-trained employees remain competitive globally and seafood quality has improved. The FDA has evaluated HACCP training and found it to be extremely effective. Estimates suggest that at least \$115,000,000 in economic losses from food-borne contamination have been prevented.



Image: New York Sea Grant

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For more than 40 years, the National Sea Grant College program has worked to create and maintain a healthy coastal environment and economy. The Sea Grant network includes more than 30 programs based at top universities in every coastal and Great Lakes state, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The programs of the Sea Grant network work together to help citizens understand, conserve and better utilize America's coastal, ocean and Great Lakes resources.



A Taku fisheries processing plant worker shows off a nice coho salmon just offloaded from a troller at the company's dock in downtown Juneau, Alaska. Sea Grant programs work with seafood processing plants to educate managers on how to write HACCP plans and develop sanitation control procedures, both required by federal law (Image: Kurt Byers, Alaska Sea Grant)

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