
FARMING SEAGRASSES AND SEAWEEDS:

Responsible Restoration
& Revenue Generation

A Report Generated by the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences for the
Interagency Working Group for the Farming of Seagrasses and Seaweeds

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the United States Congress charged the Secretary of Agriculture, in coordination with the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to establish a working group to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of U.S. seaweeds and seagrass farming, describing its current state, its potential to drive economic growth through production of livestock feeds and other commercial applications, and improve ocean health through deacidification. USDA partnered with Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences (BLOS), a global research institution located in East Boothbay, Maine, for assistance in collecting public input, providing subject matter expertise, and drafting a report to fulfill the Congressional mandate.

Bigelow Laboratory and the 46-member U.S. Government Interagency Working Group (IWG) for the Farming of Seaweeds and Seagrasses gained valuable insight from more than one thousand stakeholders representing communities across the United States and its territories. Through a series of inclusive listening sessions and workshops, purposeful research pilot projects, and one-on-one meetings, the IWG gained much information about the state of the science and the industry from individuals, organizations, and governments.

The report is shaped by thoughtful stakeholder insight, science, and facts and includes valuable perspectives from the nation's Indigenous peoples. It is built to satisfy Congress' expectations and provide the public and policymakers with sound information and a precise set of recommendations that, if taken, hold great potential to ignite growth of an emerging high powered and environmentally beneficial economic sector.

Scientific research, government funding, environmental implications, and commercial activity related to U.S. seaweed farming and seagrass restoration have spiked since the turn of the century, largely driven by their nutritional and climate positive applications. The report will show significant growth in scientific understanding and the commercialization of beneficial everyday food, animal feed, health, fuel, ecosystem services, carbon markets, and bio-based products from seaweeds in particular. A small but mighty industry is forming along the nation's coastlines, transforming working waterfronts and giving a boost of energy into already emerging life science and blue economy clusters from Maine to Alaska and beyond.

The science is motivating demonstrable growth in the sector. Commercial interests are accelerating marketplace activity because consumers are demanding new products. The future of the sector could be bright if it can be positioned to thrive into the future. The set of comprehensive recommendations in this report were created with much input from across the country and with the goal of helping this nascent sector to flourish and become an ecological and economic driver for good. A snapshot of the highest priority recommendations is set forth in the graphic on next page.

Responsible Restoration & Revenue Generation from Farming US Seagrasses and Seaweeds

