

By Land and By Sea

By Amanda Beal

Maine's primary food producers, fishermen and farmers, face many economic, environmental, political, and market-access challenges. Although often thought of as separate sectors, farmers and fishermen are connected through the mechanisms of our general food system and through the natural resources required to produce food. Could collaboration between Maine's farming and fishing communities:

- Strengthen our local food system?
- Increase market shares and margins for local producers?
- Break down common barriers and challenges?
- Better direct and leverage limited existing resources?

Nearly two years ago, the Eat Local Foods Coalition (ELFC) of Maine, a statewide nonprofit dedicated to *helping to put more Maine food on more Maine tables more often*, began organizing a project to investigate opportunities that could mutually benefit and strengthen all producer groups. This internationally recognized project, By Land and By Sea (BLBS), has engaged representatives of more than two dozen farming and fishing organizations in Maine, representing thousands of stakeholders, to discuss how best to collaboratively support local food producers, meet infrastructure needs, build consumer support, address policy changes, and determine where it is most beneficial to focus energy and resources to create a food system that is more sustainable, economically viable, and locally based.

Representatives of the BLBS project conducted regional forums across the state where hundreds of farmers and fishermen discussed where they see the

most benefit from shared solutions. Two key "results" documents, available at www.eatmainefoods.org, are guiding ELFC and coalition members in efforts to amplify the voices and needs of our farmers and fishermen and to implement ideas gathered at these forums and from the numerous farming, fishing, and food-related organizations participating in the BLBS project.

The *By Land and By Sea: Post Regional Forums Data Summary* is a complete report of the compiled data gathered at each forum and key themes that arose from discussions that were focused around infrastructure, markets/market access, policy, and consumer education.

A policy brief for policymakers, *Food Security, Jobs and the Environment*, was compiled and distributed to the governor and members of several legislative committees, asking that policymakers make food and related jobs and environmental impact a priority investment in 2011 and beyond. In this document, numerous short- and long-term policy strategies are recommended that would benefit Maine's food producers and consumers, such as:

- Institute preferential buying measures to favor Maine-caught and -grown products for all food purchases with state funds.
- Facilitate opportunities for in-state processing and cooperative marketing, especially to include lobster, shellfish, and other seafood products and work within existing structures to establish a broad-based, affordable pool of money to jump-start value-added and innovative food businesses.
- Commit the state to buying 25 percent of available federal fishing permits yearly for the next 10 years to re-establish fishing opportunities for new entrants.
- Provide access to a medical insurance pool to all Maine fishermen and farmers through the adoption of a program modeled after the Massachusetts Fishermen's Partnership Health Care Plan to begin in 2014.
- Research the capacity of our environment and our food infrastructure to produce and deliver a nutritionally balanced diet to all Maine citizens. 