

# An Economic Development Strategy for Louisiana's Coastal Seafood Industry

December 2020



Louisiana Entrepreneurship & Economic Development Center





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## About Meridian Institute:

Meridian Institute is a mission-driven, non-profit organization that has helped its clients and partners develop and implement solutions to complicated, often controversial problems—big and small, global and local—for over two decades. To learn more, visit [www.merid.org](http://www.merid.org) or connect on Twitter @MeridOrg.

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## About the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, B.I. Moody III College of Business Administration:

The B.I. Moody III College of Business Administration began as the Department of Business in 1902. For more than a century, Moody Business has developed ethically responsible professionals and scholars who positively impact our Acadiana region, Louisiana, and the global community.

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## About Louisiana Sea Grant:

Since its establishment in 1968, the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program has worked to promote stewardship of the state's coastal resources through a combination of research, education, and outreach.

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## About the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board:

Louisiana Seafood Promotion & Marketing Board was created to support Louisiana's world-class seafood industry and does so through programs that encourage the use of Louisiana seafood by consumers and commercial interests.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



For as long as people have settled along Louisiana's wetlands, they have fished for shrimp and crab, reeled in catfish, and harvested oysters from coastal reefs. While the state's seafood industry has this strong legacy, today, it is an undervalued and under-resourced component of rural economies across the coastal parishes. Annually, Louisiana's seafood industry produces an economic impact of over \$2.4 billion<sup>1</sup>, and Louisiana's fishermen bring in the second largest volume of seafood by state, second only to Alaska. Despite the importance of this industry to the state economy, economic development initiatives often overlook seafood businesses. This is the case even as they struggle to survive devastating hurricanes (including Hurricane Laura in August 2020), adapt

to supply chain disruptions and reduced demand for seafood caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, compete against increasing volumes of cheap foreign seafood imports, and face an uncertain future along Louisiana's eroding coastline.

In order to highlight this important industry and catalyze economic development efforts to sustain it, we embarked on a research effort, supported by USDA's Office of Rural Development and the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board. We engaged seafood businesses, learned about their challenges firsthand, and crafted an economic development strategy for the industry, grounded in a collaborative research approach. In this report, we characterize the coastal region of Louisiana and the seafood industry; provide an overview of the seafood supply chain; describe the industry's challenges and needs; and outline a set of eight goals and 24 strategies to support the industry's long-term success. The economic development strategies are tailored to those who can make a difference. The issues and solutions proposed in this report can be utilized by government agencies and legislators to support the seafood industry and coastal adaptation, operators pursuing innovative business development, and economic developers designing initiatives that target critical supply chain opportunities with cascading benefits throughout the industry.

<sup>1</sup>. <https://www.crt.state.la.us/Assets/Tourism/research/documents/2018-2019/2018%20Louisiana%20Tourism%20Economic%20Impact%20rev.pdf>

Over the two years of this research effort, the team interviewed fishermen, processors, distributors, retailers, restaurant owners, chefs, economic developers, nonprofits, local, regional, state, and federal government officials, and industry leaders along Louisiana's coastal parishes. Informed by their experiences and perspectives, we mapped the structure and character of the industry as well as its strengths, weaknesses, and economic development needs. This report is intended to provide independent insights and recommendations that can underpin future regional and state economic development actions to support and strengthen this critical element of Louisiana's culture and economy.

## REPORT BY THE NUMBERS



**10**

Coastal  
Parishes Visted



**100+**

Stakeholders  
Engaged



**8**

Goals for the  
Seafood Industry



**24**

Strategies to Get There



## MAP OF THE STUDY AREA: LOUISIANA COASTAL PARISHES



### Legend

■ Study Area

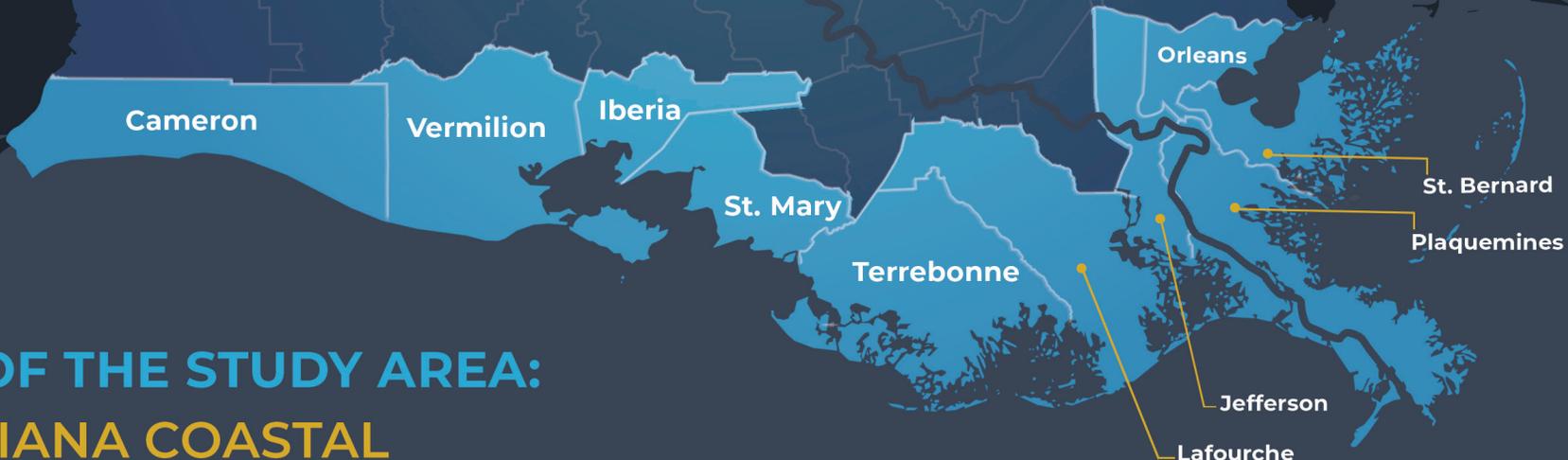


Figure I. Map of the study area

### CHARACTER AND CULTURE OF LOUISIANA'S

### COASTAL SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Louisiana's coastal seafood industry has a unique culture and heritage that must be understood to create and implement economic development strategies for Louisiana's coastal parishes. Seafood businesses operating in coastal Louisiana are primarily comprised of intergenerational family businesses, some of whom can trace their family involvement in the seafood industry back four or five generations. Pride of occupation, self-reliance, and adaptation to adversity are central to the culture and heritage of Louisiana fishing families. Generations of Louisiana fishermen

have weathered hurricanes that have destroyed entire coastal communities, as well as economic downturns that shuttered businesses and forced community members to find work elsewhere. Fishing families have all faced these challenges in addition to the harsh, day-to-day conditions of living and working on the water. This long history of resilience and adaptation has been passed down through family storytelling and is the source of an intense pride in their culture, sense of place, and occupation.

This shared history and knowledge between fishing families creates an intense camaraderie with other fishermen and fishing families, who are quick to help one another in times of crisis. After a hurricane, fishermen help one another rebuild boats and call on

business relationships to repair infrastructure so all can get back on the water as soon as possible. The self-reliant, tough, proud spirit of Louisiana fishermen permeates the industry and forms the heart and soul of Louisiana's coastal culture.



## THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY SUPPLY CHAIN

Evaluating the coastal seafood industry supply chain to identify opportunities for improving industry efficiencies, market access, and customer product perceptions is key to increasing the value of Louisiana seafood and diversifying the supply chain. The coastal Louisiana seafood supply chain has multiple tiers and channels that move product into commerce. **Figure 2** provides a breakdown of the supply chain businesses that influence the efficiency and effectiveness of getting Louisiana seafood onto consumers' plates in homes and restaurants. It is important to note that this figure represents an overall assessment of the seafood supply chain, which varies between individual businesses and type of seafood product.



Louisiana's coastal seafood industry is complex, featuring both large, medium, and small volume operators with varying business models, market strategies, and opportunities for growth. Louisiana's coastal seafood industry is composed of harvesters, docks, processors, distributors, retailers, and restaurants that deal with four major categories of species: shrimp, crab, oysters, and finfish (including a variety of species such as amberjack, black drum, grouper, mackerel, red snapper, mullet, and other finfish). Many operations harvest, process, and/or distribute multiple species based on price, availability, and demand. This range of operators forms the foundation of the industry's resilience, as a diversity of operations provides increased opportunities for adaptation, innovative partnerships, and growth.



# SEAFOOD SUPPLY CHAIN SUMMARY

Inputs, Technology & Financing	Seafood Production	Docks & Buyers	Processing & Manufacturing	Packaging	Warehousing	Transportation & Logistics	Distributions & Wholesalers	Retailers
Shipyards & Boat Launch	Fresh Operations	Docks	Large Volume Processors	Processor/ Manufacturer Brands	Fresh Storage	Fresh Product	Local	Grocery Stores
Fuel Suppliers	Frozen Operations	Buyers	Micro - Processors	Private Label Brands	Cold Storage	Processed Product	Regional	Seafood Markets
Ice Suppliers				White Label Brands			National	Restaurants
Marine Suppliers							International	Direct to Consumer
LA Sea Grant & University Support								
Ports & Economic Development								
Financial Institutions								

**Figure 2.** Summary of Louisiana’s Seafood Supply Chain. This figure represents an overall assessment of the companies that comprise Louisiana’s coastal seafood supply chain. Actual companies involved can vary within and across species of seafood – crab, oyster, finfish, and shrimp. Appendix B includes a more detailed table that outlines the value proposition offered by each supply chain actor.

## CHALLENGES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Louisiana's seafood industry is located primarily in the state's rural coastal parishes, which has resulted in environmental, economic, logistics, and engagement challenges that threaten supply chain stability and industry longevity (Table I). Economically, Louisiana's seafood industry faces steep competition with foreign imports and declining profitability due to stagnating seafood prices. Environmental disruptions to the industry include more frequent high-water events, coastal wetland loss, more frequent devastating hurricanes, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, all of which reduce fishery productivity and require longer term climate adaptation.

Two of the most significant of these challenges facing the coastal seafood industry today are competition with foreign imports and industry coordination with government agencies. Addressing these challenges are key to supporting the industry's future success and are a primary focus of the economic development plan presented in this report.

The United States is now the largest global seafood importer by value and second largest by quantity in order to satisfy the skyrocketing consumer demand for seafood while domestic fishery landings have remained constant or declined. Louisiana's fishermen, and particularly shrimpers, point to the high volume

of imports as a major driver of stagnating domestic seafood prices. Foreign aquaculture companies, particularly those in major export countries such as India, Ecuador, Thailand, and Vietnam, conduct large-scale aquaculture operations with access to cheap labor, chemicals, inputs, and government subsidies that allow them to produce and export seafood products at a lower price than wild-caught Louisiana seafood with increased certainty in size and volume.

Another major challenge for Louisiana's seafood industry is aligning industry-wide coordinating bodies and working with economic development agencies and coastal restoration planning efforts. Shrimp, crab, oyster, and finfish task forces represent Louisiana's seafood and make recommendations to the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, and various industry associations that engage in policy advocacy (such as the American Shrimp Processors Association). However, the industry lacks one clear voice, organization, or advocacy body that speaks cohesively on behalf of the entire industry to influence decision-making within two planning processes that significantly impact the industry- economic development planning and state coastal restoration planning.

## Economic Challenges

- **Competition with foreign imports**
- **Reduction in profitability**
- **COVID-19 pandemic**

## Logistics & Workforce Challenges

- **Cold storage**
- **Transportation**
- **Workforce**

## Industry Coordination with Government Agencies

- **Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority**
- **Louisiana Economic Development**

## Environmental Disruptions

- **Coastal Wetland**
- **High River Events**
- **Hurricanes**
- **Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill**

Table I: Overview of Louisiana Seafood Industry Challenges and Needs

# 2020's Unparalleled Challenges

2020 battered Louisiana's seafood industry with double crises – a global pandemic and a devastating hurricane season – just as the state faced an economic downturn as economic activity slowed due to pandemic lockdowns. These crises have hit Louisiana's seafood industry particularly hard but have also created an opportunity to refocus state economic development efforts on local food systems and supply chains, supporting local businesses that can adapt to disruptions and improving the overall resilience of communities.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached southern Louisiana and began rapidly spreading across the state. By mid-March, a study by the University of Louisiana at Lafayette showed that Louisiana had the highest growth rate of coronavirus cases in the world, triggering Governor John Bel Edwards to issue a statewide stay-at-home order that lasted from March 22 until May 15. Since the vast majority of seafood products are consumed in restaurant settings, Louisiana fishermen, processors, and distributors faced a sharp decline in seafood demand and consumption just as the spring fishing season began to open. In response to this market disruption, some fishermen and processors quickly adapted to the reduced demand for seafood products from restaurants and pivoted to selling directly to consumers through local farmers markets, pop-up seafood markets, online sales platforms, and/or through posting on social media.

On August 27, 2020, Hurricane Laura made landfall on Louisiana's coast with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour, making it one of the strongest storms ever to hit the United States. The storm devastated Calcasieu and Cameron Parishes in western Louisiana, destroying homes, businesses, and public infrastructure and leaving residents without power or electricity. Fishing boats and seafood businesses were similarly impacted, leaving the fishing industry in these parishes nonfunctional until infrastructure, businesses, and boats can be repaired. Six weeks after Hurricane Laura made landfall, Hurricane Delta hit nearly the same location as a Category 2 storm. All in all, the 2020 hurricane season had 27 named storms, tying with 2005 for the most-named storms on record.

Without affordable insurance to help rebuild, a single flood or storm can put fishermen, processors, and docks out of business permanently. Consequently, severe weather threatens not only individual businesses, but the entire seafood supply chain. State and parish programs that assist businesses and communities in planning for and responding to environmental hazards can have a significant impact on the local economy and community stability by considering longer-term climate adaptation strategies.

In order to understand how the industry’s challenges and needs relate to economic development opportunities, we categorized them as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, or threats (**Figure III**). Factors threatening the industry today include economic challenges such as competition by foreign imports, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a range of critical disruptions, including reduced fishery productivity, hurricanes, and coastal wetland loss. As demand for seafood has increased in the United States and foreign imports have skyrocketed to meet demand, prices for seafood have stagnated and fishermen who harvest wild-caught species struggle to compete against cheaper, more consistent sources of seafood (both farmed and wild). Exacerbating this issue is a general decline in fishery productivity in the Gulf, limiting the ability of Louisiana fishermen and processors to compete at scale. Furthermore, fishermen and processors’ location along the Gulf Coast makes them vulnerable to natural disasters, including hurricanes and coastal wetland loss, that threaten rural coastal communities and jeopardize essential infrastructure. In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered restaurants and disrupted seafood supply chains, requiring fishermen to quickly pivot business operations and further challenging the industry’s survival.

Weaknesses within the seafood industry include limited transportation and infrastructure in some parishes and the absence of a reliable labor pipeline.

Flexible, convenient cold storage and transportation options are scarce in many rural Louisiana parishes, limiting fishermen’s ability to store and transport their catch to the most profitable markets. The industry’s labor issues include difficulties recruiting and training domestic workers as well as predictably securing visas for temporary, foreign laborers. Most significantly, the lack of an industry-wide organization and consistent coordination with state planning agencies inhibits the industry’s ability to develop coordinated responses to address these challenges.



Figure 3. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing the Louisiana coastal seafood industry.



Fortunately, the seafood industry has several significant strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to enhance its market position, build a national presence, diversify operations, and create sustained success. Louisiana’s seafood industry has a strong foundation for delivering product, bringing in significant fishery landings each year as compared to other states (Table II). In addition, the commercial fishing industry has a strong narrative and cultural significance in the state that can be leveraged for marketing and branding efforts to increase product value. There are several opportunities to explore new markets for Louisiana seafood, including markets for new species, new value-added products, and expanded direct marketing opportunities, including e-commerce. Ultimately, Louisiana seafood businesses have a long history of recovering from hurricanes, natural disasters, and

long-term environmental changes. With the support of targeted economic development initiatives, decision-makers and practitioners can harness this tradition of coastal adaptation and resilience to build a more successful industry.

With this analysis in hand, we assembled a set of economic development strategies to address the

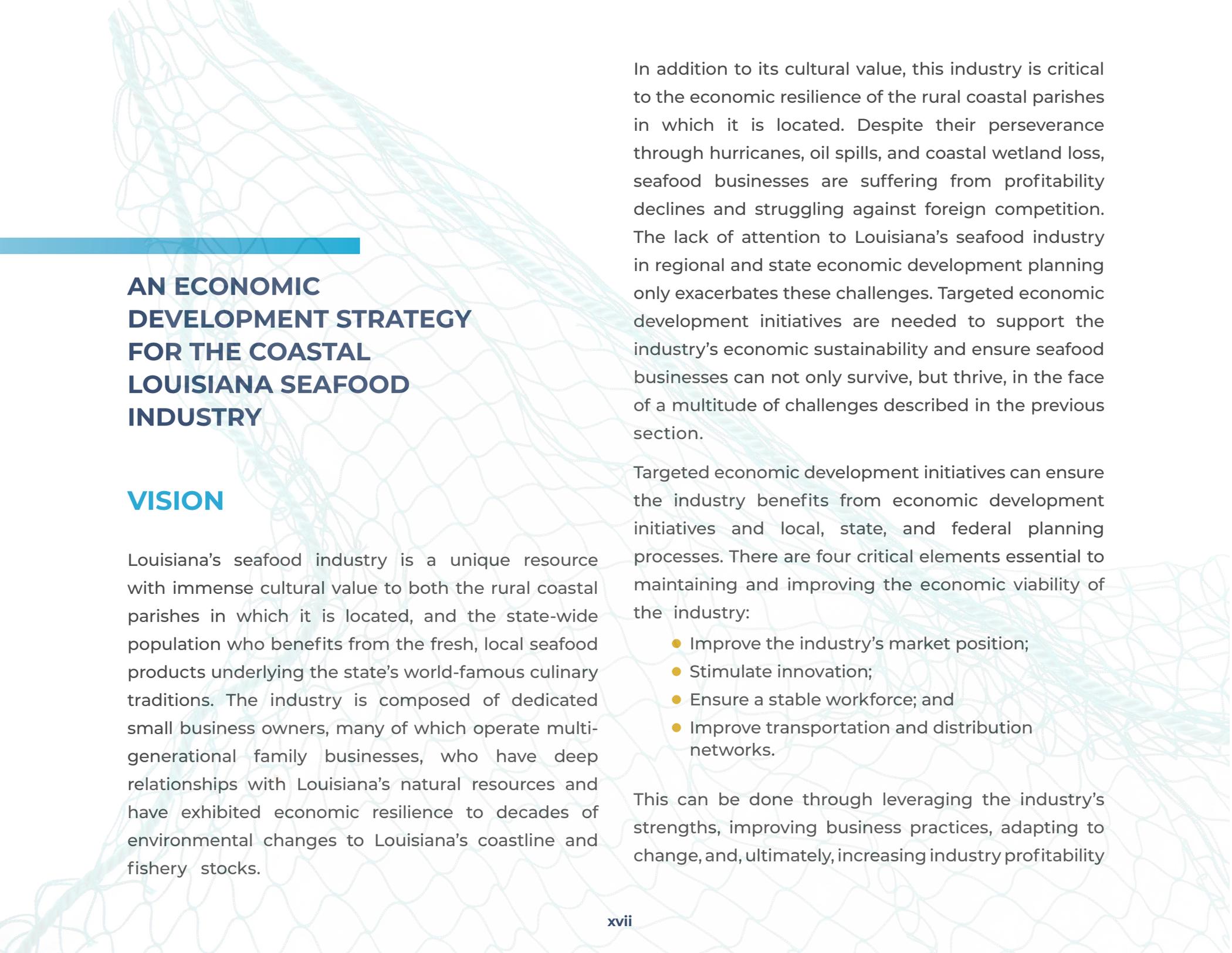
State	2018 Seafood landings (million lbs.)	Percentage of total U.S. landings
Alaska	5,400	57%
Louisiana	1,000	11%
Washington	590	6%
Virginia	362.5	4%
Mississippi	320.3	3%

**Table 2.** Top 5 states in 2018 seafood landings  
Source: NOAA Report, “Fisheries of the United States, 2018.”

industry's weaknesses, leverage its strengths, build systems to manage threats, and take advantage of emerging opportunities. As we brainstormed options, we reflected them back to industry stakeholders for feedback and refinement. Ultimately, we identified eight goals for the industry categorized into three focus areas — 1) Engagement, Planning, and Resources; 2) Marketing, Branding, and Innovation; and, 3) Workforce and Infrastructure. For each goal, we outlined a set of sub-strategies and designated whether a government agency, the industry as a whole, or individual businesses are best positioned to implement it (see Section III).

This suite of goals and strategies are designed to improve the industry's market position, stimulate innovation, ensure a stable workforce, and improve transportation and distribution networks. In combination, these four critical elements are essential to maintain and improve the economic viability of the industry and ensure its long-term resilience to both economic and environmental disruptions. Fostering a resilient seafood industry has never been more important than it is today, as Louisiana fishermen, processors, distributors, and restaurants grapple with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on seafood supply chain and the devastation caused by the devastating 2020 hurricane season.





## **AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR THE COASTAL LOUISIANA SEAFOOD INDUSTRY**

### **VISION**

Louisiana's seafood industry is a unique resource with immense cultural value to both the rural coastal parishes in which it is located, and the state-wide population who benefits from the fresh, local seafood products underlying the state's world-famous culinary traditions. The industry is composed of dedicated small business owners, many of which operate multi-generational family businesses, who have deep relationships with Louisiana's natural resources and have exhibited economic resilience to decades of environmental changes to Louisiana's coastline and fishery stocks.

In addition to its cultural value, this industry is critical to the economic resilience of the rural coastal parishes in which it is located. Despite their perseverance through hurricanes, oil spills, and coastal wetland loss, seafood businesses are suffering from profitability declines and struggling against foreign competition. The lack of attention to Louisiana's seafood industry in regional and state economic development planning only exacerbates these challenges. Targeted economic development initiatives are needed to support the industry's economic sustainability and ensure seafood businesses can not only survive, but thrive, in the face of a multitude of challenges described in the previous section.

Targeted economic development initiatives can ensure the industry benefits from economic development initiatives and local, state, and federal planning processes. There are four critical elements essential to maintaining and improving the economic viability of the industry:

- Improve the industry's market position;
- Stimulate innovation;
- Ensure a stable workforce; and
- Improve transportation and distribution networks.

This can be done through leveraging the industry's strengths, improving business practices, adapting to change, and, ultimately, increasing industry profitability

through differentiating Louisiana seafood from other products. Eight practical goals, organized in three focus areas, can help Louisiana realize this vision for its seafood industry. **Appendix A** includes an inventory of financial resources, grants, and programs that can be leveraged to implement these strategies.

For each strategy, we have indicated whether government, industry, individual businesses, or a combination thereof should be the primary entity responsible for implementation using the symbols below. We also recognize that universities and non-governmental organizations are integral partners in these efforts and can contribute invaluable expertise



GOVERNMENT



INDUSTRY



INDIVIDUAL BUSINESS  
OWNERS



# GOALS FOR THE COASTAL LOUISIANA SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

## ENGAGEMENT, PLANNING, AND RESOURCES



Economic development agencies and financial entities should proactively engage the seafood industry to ensure all businesses can equitably access the capital they need to prosper.



Ensure that the industry can participate in local, state, and federal decision making on issues critical to the industry's survival.



Create venues for the industry to develop and implement shared strategies to thrive and adapt to future changes and disruptions.



Improve the industry's market position by leveraging the culture and stories of Louisiana fishermen and the quality and sustainability of Louisiana fisheries.

GOAL

1

GOAL

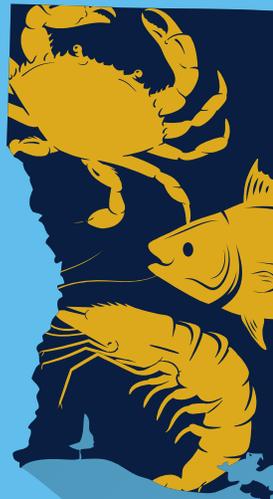
2

GOAL

3

GOAL

4



## WORKFORCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE



## MARKETING BRANDING AND INNOVATION

GOAL  
8

Improve seafood infrastructure resilience to protect against damage from high winds and storm surge associated with severe weather events, and proactively consider climate adaptation strategies.



GOAL  
7

Improve the efficiency of the industry's transportation and distribution networks.



GOAL  
6

Ensure the seafood industry has a diverse and stable workforce of U.S. and foreign workers. Recruit and train a new generation of seafood workers and business owners.



GOAL  
5

Stimulate industry innovation by developing new markets for Louisiana seafood, new value-added products, and technologies and connecting fishermen to new market opportunities to diversify the supply chain.



## ENGAGEMENT, PLANNING, AND RESOURCES

While there have been advancements in recognizing the value of the seafood sector in Louisiana and supporting its survival, there are still several critical unmet needs. Chief among these is the opportunity to organize and elevate seafood industry voices to plan for the future, participate in critical decision-making processes, and provide seafood businesses with the resources to ensure their continued success.

The goals below create an ecosystem of support by linking resources and efforts across communities who can organize effectively to help the industry thrive. There is a strong need to align economic development resources, establish coordination mechanisms, and provide long-standing support in a neutral environment where industry and government actors can come together, pool their knowledge and skills, and plan for the future.

### GOAL

#### 1

**Economic development agencies and financial entities should proactively engage the seafood industry to ensure all businesses can equitably access the capital they need to prosper.**

The economic resilience of Louisiana's seafood industry depends on establishing equitable pathways for businesses to access financial resources, technical assistance, and capital. Under-capitalization of boats and processors is a major challenge for the industry, and many fishermen suffer from the inability to take out loans for boat repairs and improvements.

### STRATEGIES



**1.1 Connect under-capitalized seafood businesses to financial resources.**



**1.2 Develop new financing mechanisms to support seafood industry development.**



**1.3 Develop risk management products or programs for the seafood industry.**



## GOAL 2

### **Ensure that the industry can participate in local, state, and federal decision making on issues critical to the industry's survival.**

In order to access state programs and resources, seafood businesses in Louisiana currently navigate a web of agencies including the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, Department of Agriculture, and Louisiana Economic Development. As a result, the seafood industry does not have a clear, single point of contact within Louisiana State Government for consistent support.

The lack of a unified seafood strategy and equitable representation across state agencies adds transaction costs, resulting in agency service gaps. With multiple state agencies struggling to support the growth of Louisiana's seafood industry, industry professionals do not have a clear understanding of each agency's seafood-related services and programs and/or how these agencies can assist their operations. Streamlining interactions between the seafood industry and state agencies would help align state-level activities around industry priorities and would improve communications between stakeholders and decision makers.

## STRATEGIES



**2.1 Coordinate with seafood task forces to establish a centralized, statewide government coordinating entity for the seafood industry to interact with Louisiana's state agencies, instead of the many touch points across a plethora of agencies.**

## GOAL 3

### **Create venues for the industry to develop and implement shared strategies to thrive and adapt to future changes and disruptions.**

Although segments of the seafood industry are organized through the seafood task forces and industry associations, there is a need for the entire industry to come together with academics, NGOs, and government experts to plan for the industry's long-term resilience to economic and environmental disruptions. A strategic planning effort that engages all segments of the seafood industry is essential to understand and articulate the industry's challenges and plan for how partnerships and government can support the longevity of the industry. This would be a parallel, non-governmental effort to support alignment and planning within the industry, and inform government engagement efforts, such as the seafood task forces and the Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board.

## STRATEGIES



**3.1 Designate a central entity to convene a statewide forum on topics of importance to the future of the industry.**





## MARKETING, BRANDING, AND INNOVATION

Despite Louisiana seafood being a premium, wild-caught, domestic product, it is often not treated as such due to packaging that fails to distinguish it from commodity competitors. For example, a package of high quality, plate frozen shrimp placed in a white box with a black label instantly becomes a “bottom of the freezer” product. This failure of marketing and branding has significant implications for the way Louisiana seafood is perceived nationally and its competitiveness and price in the domestic seafood market.

The COVID-19 pandemic has consumers turning their attention to supporting regional food systems and small businesses. The Louisiana seafood industry can leverage this opportunity to highlight the culture and character of the small businesses that comprise its supply chain. We envision a new narrative for Louisiana’s seafood industry that utilizes creative marketing and branding to tell the story of generational fishermen living off the land and producing wild caught Gulf shrimp, oysters, crabs, and finfish.

In addition to improving marketing and branding of current products, the following goals are framed to help Louisiana’s seafood industry explore innovative value-added seafood products, new species to harvest, and new market opportunities. Ultimately, this group of goals is designed to distinguish Louisiana seafood from other seafood products and improve the profitability of Louisiana seafood businesses. Implementing these goals and strategies will require a commitment from individual entrepreneurs, the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, and government economic developers, who should support these initiatives.





GOAL  
4

**Improve the industry’s market position by leveraging the culture and stories of Louisiana fishermen and the quality and sustainability of Louisiana fisheries.**

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Support for industry-wide and business-specific marketing and branding initiatives is needed to connect consumers to the faces and stories of Louisiana fishermen. Louisiana fishermen have a unique connection to wild-caught seafood, often passed down through generations of their family. Their distinct culture and independent spirit garners wide popular appeal, as demonstrated by the co-opting of Louisiana culture by national chain restaurants that do not source their seafood from Louisiana. This strong culture can be leveraged to differentiate products from competitors at each level of the supply chain.

A coordinated, industry-wide marketing and branding effort is needed to articulate the value proposition of Louisiana seafood and change its positioning in the minds of consumers and restaurants from a commodity product to a luxury good. In addition, individual entrepreneurs are key to advancing new approaches for their businesses. The strategies presented below attempt to harness the cultural interest of Louisiana fishermen to promote the product they produce, as well as propose partnerships and education efforts to strengthen and support infrastructure for marketing efforts.

**STRATEGIES**



**4.1 Louisiana’s Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board should undertake a strategic planning effort to determine how to best tell the story of Louisiana seafood locally and nationally and effectively influence purchasing by large volume distributors and retailers.**



**4.2 Fishermen and seafood processors should develop individualized marketing materials, including those targeting direct to consumer sales.**



**4.3 Educate consumers and chefs about seafood product quality and how to source, handle, and prepare Louisiana seafood products.**



**4.4 The Louisiana state government should increase monitoring and enforcement around the seafood labeling law.**



**4.5 The Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board should encourage restaurants and retail markets that serve local seafood to proudly market the source of their seafood.**

## GOAL 5

### **Stimulate industry innovation by developing new markets for Louisiana seafood, new value-added products, and technologies and connecting fishermen to new market opportunities to diversify the supply chain.**

Assisting Louisiana entrepreneurs as they grow their companies, create new value-added products, and expand into new markets is essential to fostering industry innovation and increasing business competitiveness. The COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment where a business' ability to be innovative and adaptive is key to success. Economic development resources should be aligned to help seafood businesses adapt to changing conditions by experimenting with innovative business strategies. The following strategies are designed to help Louisiana fishermen improve their profitability and differentiate their products from commodity competitors.

### STRATEGIES

-   **5.1** Develop a New Orleans fish market where fishermen can sell fresh, high-quality seafood products directly to restaurants, chefs, and consumers.
-   **5.2** Develop value-added products using Louisiana seafood.
-   **5.3** Expand the range of harvested species and create new market opportunities, in concert with fishery managers.
-  **5.4** Docks should develop a structure to pay premium prices for higher-quality products.
-   **5.5** Assess the economic, environmental, and political viability of aquaculture.



**Top:** The research team met with Brian and Corina Mobley (center), the owners of Corina Corina seafood in Galliano, Louisiana.

**Bottom left:** An employee builds crab traps at Alario Brothers, a family owned and operated marine and fishermen supply store in Westwego, Louisiana.

**Bottom right:** Crews selling fresh-caught seafood off of fishing vessels at the Hopedale Seafood Market.

## WORKFORCE AND DEVELOPMENT

A reliable workforce and accessible transportation and distribution systems are key competencies to enable the seafood industry's current and future success. However, many business owners in Louisiana's seafood industry indicate that labor is a critical bottleneck preventing the growth of their businesses and that limited distribution and cold storage options restrict where they can sell their products.



Workers at a shrimp processing facility (Newpack Shrimp Company, Westwego Louisiana) during COVID.



The following goals and strategies intend to address these fundamental needs and catalyze success, innovation, and growth in Louisiana's seafood industry. Workforce and educational programs can generate interest in the industry and ensure a stable workforce. Training programs can ensure current workers and business owners are producing high quality seafood products and running profitable operations. New partnerships can be fostered to improve cold storage and distribution options in Louisiana's coastal parishes. In combination with one another, these strategies can ensure the seafood industry has the fundamental support it needs to thrive well into the future.

## GOAL 6

### **Ensure the seafood industry has a diverse and stable workforce of U.S. and foreign workers. Recruit and train a new generation of seafood workers and business owners.**

Workforce development programs are needed to bring young talent into the industry and provide training on how to run and operate fishery businesses. Existing fishermen are also in need of training programs to develop skills regarding good business practices, direct sales, micro processing, and packaging to enable them to produce higher-quality seafood products, facilitate their involvement in direct seafood markets, and improve their overall profitability. The following strategies are specifically designed to address the industry's labor shortage and succession planning challenges.

#### STRATEGIES



**6.1 Partner with community colleges to develop seafood technical programs to provide an employment pathway for young people to enter the seafood industry.**



**6.2 Develop fisheries curriculum for 4-H and other agriculture-related outreach programs to educate elementary, middle, and high school students about opportunities in Louisiana's seafood industry.**



**6.3 Improve seafood handling practices and assist fishermen in making technological upgrades to produce higher-quality seafood products.**



**6.4 Better organize the seafood industry to advocate for improvements to the federal H2B visa program.**

# GOAL 7

## Improve the efficiency of the industry's transportation and distribution networks.

There is an opportunity for Louisiana seafood producers to sell fresh, never frozen seafood products to markets around the country. The fresh seafood market provides a price premium that does not exist in the frozen markets and represents a critical economic development opportunity for Coastal Louisiana. However, the fresh market requires short-term refrigerated storage and transportation capacity that is limited in the region. The following strategies are specifically designed to address the industry's cold storage and logistics challenges.

### STRATEGIES

 **7.1 Seafood processors, distributors, and ports should collaborate to access northern U.S. markets.**

  **7.2 Develop a cold storage cooperative model where the operator and users of the facility are all investors and work together to manage seasonal needs and availability and promote equitable access of resources.**

   **7.3 Develop partnerships that link seafood producers with third-party logistics providers.**





## GOAL 8

### **Improve seafood infrastructure resilience to protect against damage from high winds and storm surge associated with severe weather events, and proactively consider climate adaptation strategies.**

As we saw with Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Laura, Delta, and Zeta, severe weather events can decimate entire coastal communities and essential seafood industry infrastructure. Although these severe storms are unpredictable and unavoidable, advanced planning and investment can reduce damages and decrease recovery times. Anecdotal reports from Hurricane Laura recovery efforts currently underway in Cameron Parish indicate that coastal infrastructure and assets that had been upgraded survived the storm much better than older infrastructure. In addition, increasing the availability of safe harbor locations across the coast will ensure fishermen have ample choices for moving their boats out of harm's way before a storm hits.

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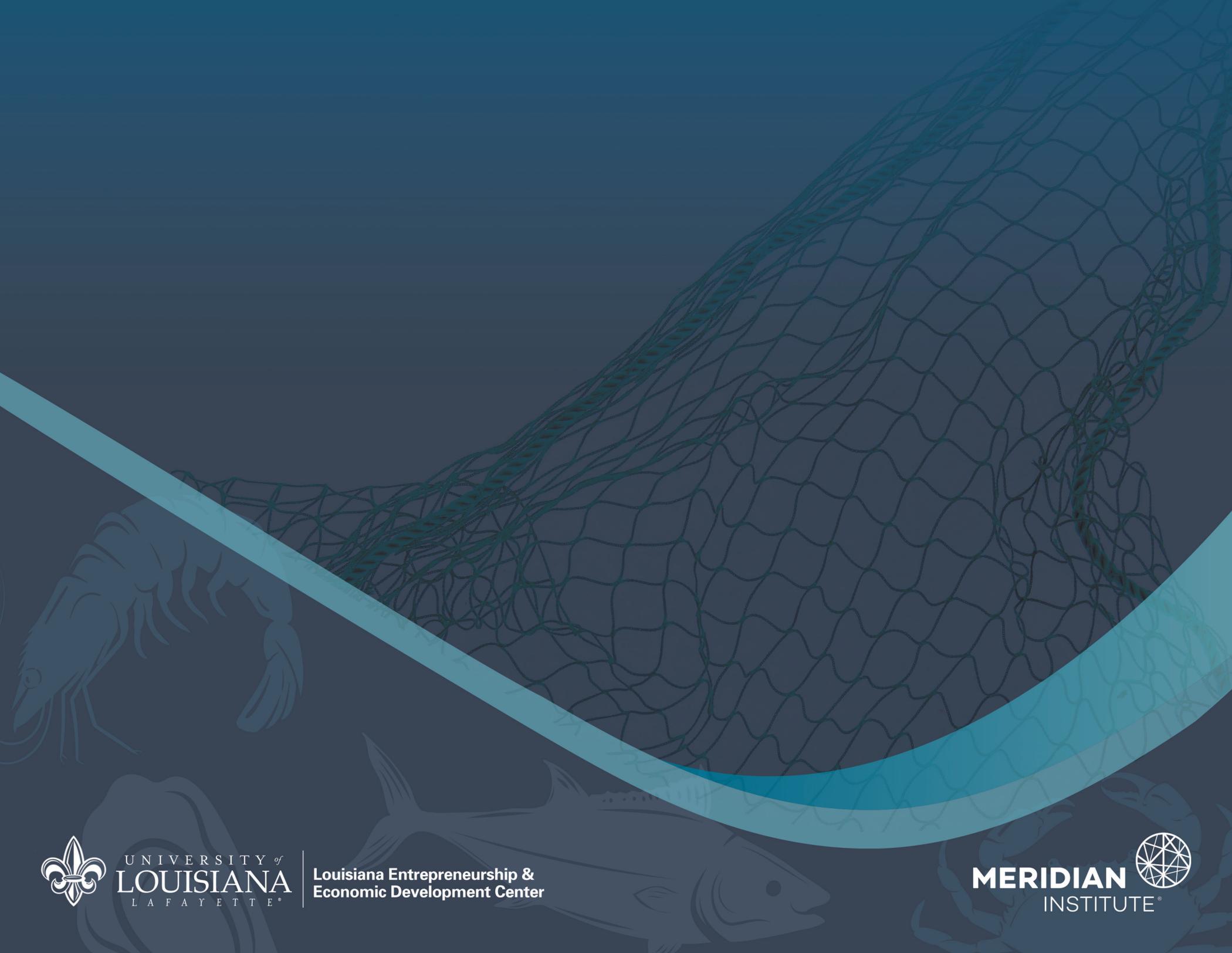
## IMPLEMENTATION

Several strategies proposed here can be implemented immediately to accelerate progress towards this vision. For example, regularly convening Louisiana seafood industry businesses through a nonprofit, university, or other third-party entity in the near term would help the industry identify priority areas of interest and develop shared strategies for action. Ultimately, helping the industry develop a unified voice will position the sector to advocate effectively on its own behalf.

The economic and environmental issues facing Louisiana's coastal seafood industry today are not unique to Louisiana. Working waterfronts across the nation are facing increasing economic and environmental threats. Urbanization, the economic downturn due to COVID-19, sea level rise, and more frequent natural disasters mean that rural communities are more vulnerable than ever. These shared vulnerabilities may mean that many of the eight goals and 24 strategies outlined in this report

can be applied to other communities and geographic locations. The basic principles of supporting the industry's engagement in decision-making, strategic planning for the future, access to resources, marketing, branding, and innovation, and workforce and infrastructure capabilities can be leveraged to revitalize working waterfronts across the United States.

In Louisiana, with targeted support from economic development organizations and state government agencies, we believe the seafood industry can deliver high-quality seafood to restaurants in the region, available fresh to Louisianans at local farmers markets and flash frozen at peak quality to share with restaurants and grocery stores around the country. We envision a seafood industry with a national reputation for delivering premium seafood products that embody the taste of America's Gulf Coast.



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