

Program Report

New York Sea Grant Seafood Incentives Program

The majority of the seafood consumed in the United States, surprisingly enough, is imported from overseas. People can quibble about the exact proportion all day; though the commonly cited statistic is 90%, a 2019 study by Gephart and others places that number closer to around 62–65%. Either way, for a country bracketed by two different oceans and one of the largest coastlines in the world—not to mention some of the most sustainable fishing practices in the world¹—that’s an oddly high number.

The Seafood Incentives Program, launched in the summer of 2022, was the combined effort of **New York Sea Grant (NYSG)** and **Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Suffolk County** to combat this issue by encouraging consumers to support and buy from their local seafood economies. We contacted seafood markets across Long Island (and even into New York City), presenting them with the opportunity to educate their customers about local New York seafood and to incentivise them to buy it. Participating businesses were provided with insulated totes, stuffed with educational pamphlets and other promotional materials, to give to their customers (for free!) upon the purchase of the businesses’ selection of local seafood. In some cases, customers got bags with every purchase they made—as many retailers supplied only from East Coast or Long Island waters—while in other cases, products were sourced from a variety of places—around the United States and around the globe—and customers had to actively choose to buy local.



Image 2 Eat New York Seafood Sticker.



Image 1 Two patrons of North Fork Seafood showcasing their new branded totes after purchasing NY Seafood at the farmers market with fishmonger Jermaine Owens. Photo Credit: Kristin Gerbino

Participant Incentives

Participating locations were able to send patrons purchasing NY farmed and fished seafood home with:

- » One NYSG insulated tote, containing:
 - Five index cards on various topics related to either the cooking or the keeping of fresh seafood purchases
 - Two pamphlets with a guide to the local seafood species of New York, as well as other information about choosing local seafood.
- » One poster advertising the “Learn to Cook Local FISH” cooking series, 11 free video recipes on YouTube where local chefs teach viewers how to make specific dishes with locally sourced seafood
- » As an added bonus, the project team was able to have “Eat New York Seafood” stickers (image 2) printed and distributed to further promote NY farmed and fished seafood.

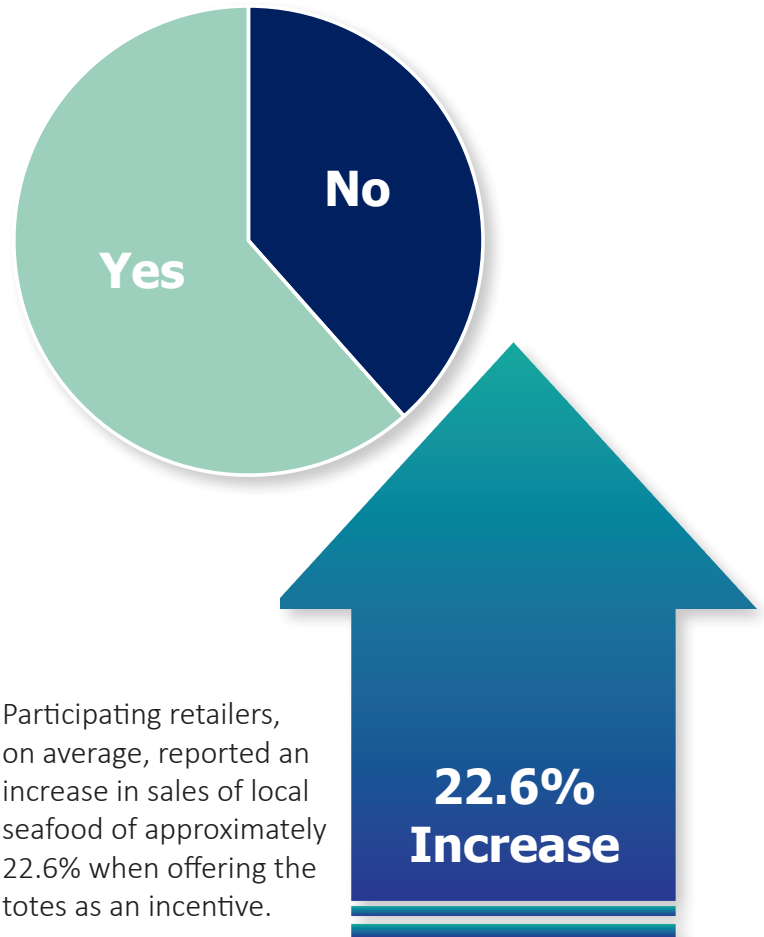
¹Gephart, Jessica A., et al. “To create sustainable seafood industries, the United States needs a better accounting of imports and exports.” *PNAS*, vol. 116, no. 19, May 2019, pp. 9142-9146, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1905650116.3rr>

Program Evaluation



Image 3 NYSG program coordinator Erin Fix (left) stands with Deidre Hanrihan (right) under the entrance for Lighthouse Seafood, a participating business. Erin holds a sample of the NYSG totes, while Deidra holds the posters provided to local businesses to advertise their participation in the program. Photo Credit: Kristin Gerbino

Approximately sixty two percent of participating retailers (n=26) who completed the post program questionnaire indicated that they noticed an **increase in sales of local seafood** when offering the totes as an incentive.



Participant Responses

“Customers asked more questions about local fish and wanted to know what more local options were.”

“Customers complimented the educational information provided with the program. We noticed an increase of repeat purchase.”

“Increased interest in local species and more customers buying local species.”

“I would notice they would inquire more about where the fish came from and for the most part choose local.”

“Improved engagement—people started asking about the totes, so they became a talking point, and the promise of free stuff got more people through the door.”

“In the store: some of them were asking specifically for NY seafood. At the Farmer's Market, people were asking for the bags.”

“I always sell local fish and local fish only so I noticed an increase in interest and sales overall because the customers wanted the totes.”