

A Guide to Effective Social Media Engagement for US Seafood

Funded by the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program



About this Guide - Scope

This guide is designed to provide U.S. fishermen, seafood farmers, and other stakeholders with cost-effective tools and resources to contribute to the broader narrative about sustainable seafood using social media.

It is the culmination of a series of message and content testing efforts by the Aquarium of the Pacific to better understand how public audiences respond to various messages about U.S. seafood. It was funded by NOAA's Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant program in 2021.

The recommendations in this guide are meant to help fishermen and seafood farmers more effectively engage with broader public audiences using social media. It will be best used to building trust and relationships within local communities and educate broader audiences. It is meant to complement, but not serve as direct marketing.

We thank all who contributed to this work, including our team of consultants and stakeholder advisory committee. A full list of contributors is available in the [acknowledgements](#).

About this Guide - Why?

Science is pointing to the important role ocean-based food systems (i.e. the harvest and farming of marine species) will play in supporting a more sustainable, nutritious, and resilient food future in the changing climate.

To realize its full potential, seafood must be produced responsibly to minimize risks while also maximizing benefits to society and the environment. One of the most effective tools to ensure responsible seafood production is effective management. The U.S. is globally recognized as a leader in fisheries and environmental management. It is also among the countries with the highest consumption of meat and seafood products. Well-managed U.S. seafood provides a domestic source of nutritious food that is consumed domestically and abroad, contributing to a more sustainable food future.

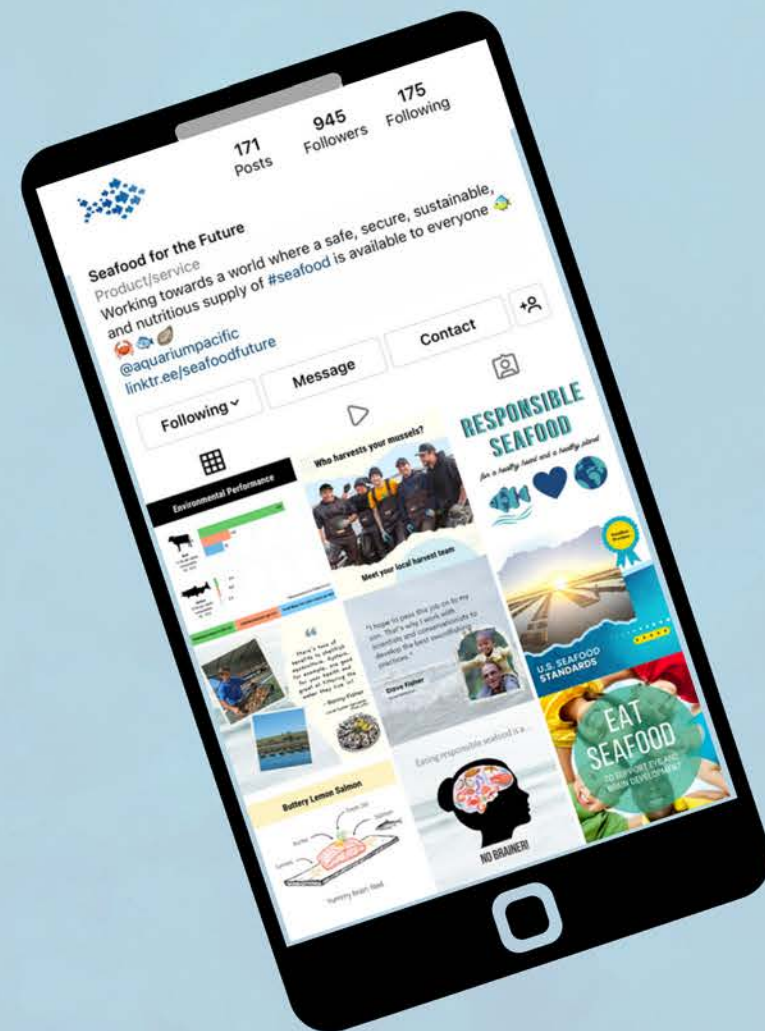
Despite all this potential, there is growing opposition that is creating challenges and barriers for responsible growth and expansion of wild and farmed seafood in the U.S. It is imperative that domestic fishermen and seafood farmers play a bigger role in sharing their stories and connecting with their communities.

Results from our surveys show that the public trusts and wants to hear from the fishermen and seafood farmers to learn more about what they do. This guide provides some tools and resources to help these stakeholders engage and share their stories more effectively with broader public audiences, even if they don't have large marketing budgets or resources. This type of engagement will also be important for fishermen and seafood farmers to build trust and relationships with the communities in which they operate.

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Why Social Media?



Social media is an important tool that provides a more accessible and affordable platform for users to: advertise content to large, targeted audiences; increase audience interactions; play a proactive role in shaping the broader narrative; and share and amplify their own stories. It also provides valuable insights for users to better understand their audiences.

Instagram was the primary social media platform used to develop content to test for this project, and is the default platform for the purposes of this guide. However, the messages and content can be applied broadly.

Social Media Platforms

The most popular platforms are Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter, and Facebook



Instagram is a good tool for engaging broader audiences with stories and connecting with them through images and short videos, also known as reels.



Tiktok is also useful for engaging broader audiences with stories and educational content and is best for short engaging videos with music and sound effects.



Twitter is a good tool to spread news, information and/or thoughts with broader audiences.



Facebook is best for connecting to people with similar interests (e.g. association members, community members). You can post images, ads, articles, video links, etc.

An aerial photograph of a fishing fleet on the ocean at sunset. The water is a mix of deep blue and golden yellow, reflecting the low sun. In the foreground, a large fishing boat with a yellow and green hull is visible, connected to a long line of white buoys. Several other fishing boats are scattered across the water, some further away. The background shows a range of mountains under a hazy, orange sky.

The Message Matters

The Message Matters

Finding the right message is key. These messages ranked highest in nationwide testing.*



Seafood is full of nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids that can support heart and brain health.



U.S. fishermen and seafood farmers are held to high standards based on strict federal regulations that protect people, wildlife, and ecosystems.



Local fisheries and seafood farms support a variety of jobs important to the economy, on boats, in seafood farms, in seafood processing, in restaurants and in grocery stores.

*see survey methodology and results in the Appendix

The Message Matters

Since 2018, the Aquarium of the Pacific has conducted a series of message and content testing surveys to better understand how the public responds to messaging about U.S. seafood.

For the purposes of this specific project, we worked with Prime Group LLC, a consulting firm that specializes in message and opinion testing. We also worked with a group of stakeholders to design another survey to dive deeper into the core themes and messages that tested best in previous surveys.

Top Performing Message Themes...

Seafood and human health.

Fishermen and seafood farmers are stewards of the environment and held to strict standards.

Seafood can support a more sustainable food future.

Local economic and community benefits of seafood.

The following pages provide additional context for how you can leverage these results to build and improve your own social media strategies.

Seafood and Human Health

KEY MESSAGES

- Seafood is packed with nutrients and antioxidants that support heart and brain health.
- Omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood have been proven to support heart and brain health.
- The American Heart Association recommends we eat at least two servings of seafood per week to support optimal heart health.
- Research shows seafood supports healthy immune systems and provides benefits for mental health.
- Using canned and frozen seafood can provide options to integrate healthy seafood into family meals with less waste

TIPS

- Highlight nutritional benefits that are specific to your product, and include supporting research where applicable.
- Include recipes and tips to make preparation and use of your product as easy and accessible as possible.
- Featuring your own family recipes and anecdotes where you can will go a long way to increase the direct connection between you and your audience.

RESOURCES

- [Seafood Nutrition Partnership](#)
- [Seafood Health Facts](#) - Delaware Sea Grant

Seafood Supports Local Communities

KEY MESSAGES

- Seafood is part of a larger marine economy that supports a variety of jobs throughout the supply chain, including processing, wholesalers, retailers, and restaurants.
- In 2019 the U.S. seafood industry supported 1.2 million jobs and added \$68 billion to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product in 2019 (see [Fisheries Economics of the U.S. - 2019](#)).
- Many commercial fishing and seafood farming operations are multi-generational, family-run businesses.
- Commercial fishing and seafood farming can be important community activities that support a local way of life.

TIPS

- This is your opportunity to share your story to make strong connections with you community. Pair broader stats with specific examples of how you engage and connect within your own community.
- Sharing videos and images of your crew and families as appropriate to show how you are connected with the communities in which you operate will be important.
- A lot of people are curious, but have no idea what fishing or seafood farming really looks like. This is an opportunity to share this with them. This should be done carefully, as images of the harvest can be tough for some people and may result in negative interactions (see Images and Concepts).
- Testing indicates that economic and job benefits perform well when in the local context. They do not do well in the broader national context (e.g. messages about the seafood trade deficit does not perform well, but providing jobs in local communities performs very well).

RESOURCES

- [NOAA Fisheries: The economic importance of seafood](#)

US Fishermen and Seafood Farmers are Ocean Stewards

KEY MESSAGES

- U.S. fishermen and seafood farmers are held to high standards based on strict federal regulations that protect people, wildlife, and ecosystems.
- Seafood farmers and fishermen depend on healthy ocean ecosystems for their livelihoods.
- Like all forms of food production, there is no such thing as zero impact seafood production. Many seafood farmers and fishermen work with researchers, environmental groups, resource managers, and others to find solutions to minimize their impact while providing more nutritious food and sustaining an important way of life for local communities.

TIPS

- Share videos and images of your crew and families as appropriate to talk about what the ocean means to you and how you rely on healthy ocean ecosystems to support your livelihoods.
- Take control of the narrative about sustainable seafood. What best practices do you implement on a regular basis to sustain your business, while also ensuring a healthy ocean environment? Sharing this with your audience will help chip away at some of the ‘mystery’ behind fishing and farming practices and build trust with your audiences and communities

RESOURCES

- [Shellfish Climate Coalition](#)
- [Gulf of Maine Research Institute](#)
- [FishWatch.gov](#)

US Seafood Can Support a More Sustainable and Resilient Food Future

KEY MESSAGES

- Most seafood sources can support a more sustainable and nutritious food supply with less reliance on land and freshwater resources and lower greenhouse gas emissions.
- Some types of seafood production (e.g. shellfish and seaweed) can provide additional benefits to local ecosystems, including improved water quality and habitat.
- Producing more food in the ocean is an important diversification strategy to support a more sustainable, resilient, and nutritious food future in the changing climate. (e.g. can be a supplemental local food source when land-based sources are threatened by climate-related events like droughts, fires, floods, etc).

TIPS

- Sustainability and conservation messages tended to be higher in coastal areas where fishing and seafood farming takes place. Integrate sustainability and conservation messages and links where possible.
- Don't overstate or embellish. Stick to the facts (see Tips for Effective Engagement).

RESOURCES

- [Blue Foods Assessment](#)
- [High Level Panel of Experts Blue Economy](#)

A man with a beard, wearing a red hooded raincoat over a dark blue jacket and blue gloves, is smiling and giving a thumbs-up gesture. He is standing on a metal deck with a railing, leaning on it. In the background, there are several fishing boats docked at a pier under a cloudy sky. A dark blue graphic overlay is on the left side of the image.

Images and Content

A picture is worth a thousand words...or likes



Images of happy workers and beautiful scenery are effective.



A picture is worth a thousand words...or likes

Providing images and glimpses into the work done on the water is important, but must be thoughtfully executed. Be sure to do so while highlighting the workers and avoiding images of animals on deck or in the gear.

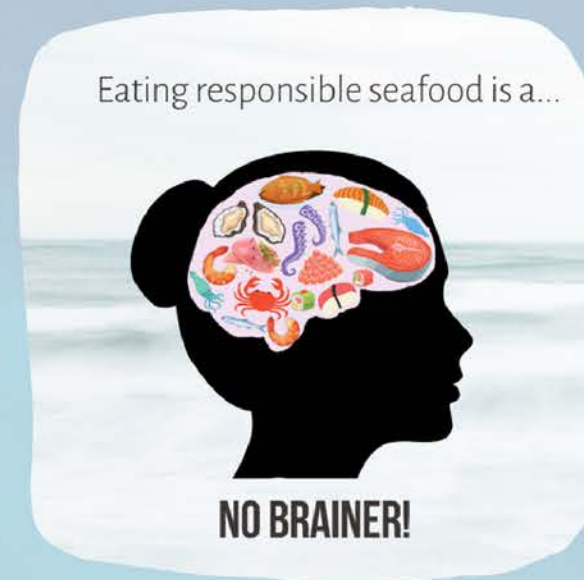


These images often remind respondents of overfishing, cruelty towards animals, and wastefulness.

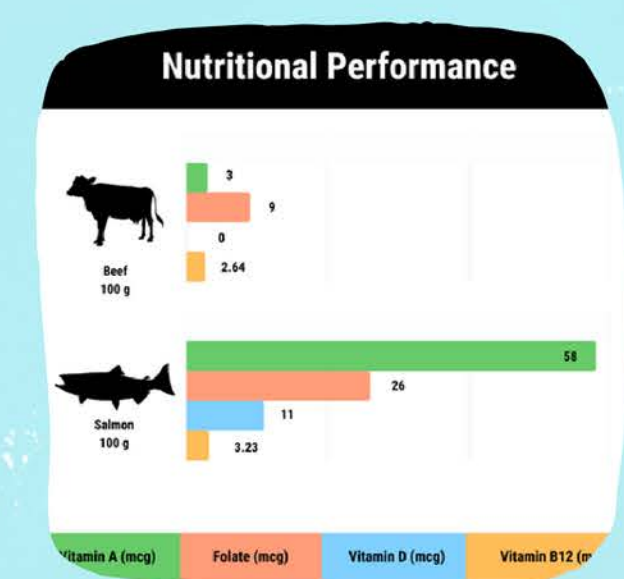
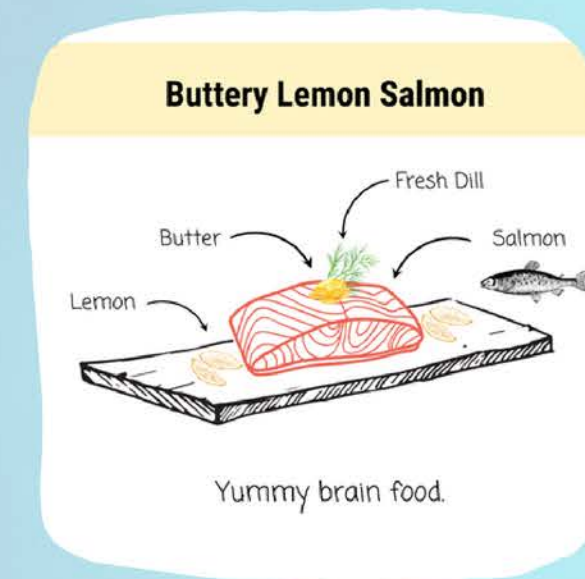
A picture is worth a thousand words...or likes

Graphics can be used to generate interest and illustrate concepts regular still images might not capture. They can be created using simple tools provided in the Helpful Tools and Gadgets section of this document.

The **top performing** graphic concepts carried simple messages with bright, colorful designs.



The **lowest performing** messages are less clear, less eye-catching, and require more context compared to the top concepts.





Tips for Effective Engagement

Tips for Engagement

Positive engagement on social media can build trust and relationships with your community and more broadly with the public. It is important to be prepared to address negative comments and interactions productively.



Identify and get to know your audience. It is important to understand who your audience is so you can create content that is relatable and relevant to them. Your audience will vary based on your businesses goals and objectives for social media.



Do not overstate or embellish facts and benefits. Getting caught in a lie or misleading statements will erode trust.



Do not deny risks exist. Address widely held concerns and point to research or reputable resources that provide appropriate context.



Focus on benefits without highlighting negative attributes of other food production. Highlight the benefits or focus on the solutions you and your peers are implementing for your production type.



Do not engage in unproductive arguments. It is okay to delete hurtful or offensive comments.



Have fun with positive interactions in the comments! This engages people trying to learn, partners in your field, or potential clients!

Tips for Posting

To establish your brand consider the middle ground between what your audience cares about and what you care about. Some ways to build connections, using your posts, are by telling stories about you and your business.



Post aesthetically pleasing images or videos (see Images and Concepts section).



Use hashtags to reach audiences. Hashtags are key words or phrases preceded by a (#) symbol. Don't overuse them and consider putting in comment section instead of caption to make the caption easier to read.



Using a hook encourages interaction and invokes curiosity. (e.g. 'Why is nobody talking about...' or 'Did you know...')



Educational and motivational content can be effective. You'll have more success with this content if you are consistent, keep it simple, share quotes and powerful stories, and relate it to your audience.



Captions should be factual, match the tone of the image or video, and add new information or context to the post.

Tips for using your phone for photos and video



Clean your phone lens. This helps you get the clearest shot.



Hold your phone still and straight. Avoid slanted and blurry images.



Focus on one subject, it helps your subject stand out



Use the **rule of thirds:** Place your subject in the left or right third of an image, leaving the other two thirds more open.



Avoid zooming in. Sometimes images can appear grainy when using zoom.

Building a Successful Social Media Plan

A successful social media presence requires consistency and strategy. Here are some tips for developing a successful social media plan for your business.



Schedule your content and consider themes for holidays and events (e.g. focus on stewardship and the importance of healthy ocean ecosystems around Earth Day).



Less is more. Spend more time posting quality posts rather than daily posts for quantity (2 or 3 good posts/week), **but be consistent!**



Adjust your content based on feedback or trends to sustain and build engagement (e.g. use video instead of still images, focus on trending topics, etc).



Schedule time to develop content and evaluate previous content successes and failures.



Helpful Tools and Gadgets

Helpful Gadgets



Tripod

Keeps the Camera Straight



Ring Light

Provides brighter lighting to reduce shadows.



Selfie Stick

Can get hard to reach angles. Suitable for taking pictures.



Selfie Stick Stabilizer

Reduces movement so you can get action shots and videos on the water without making your audience sea sick.



Phone Case

Protects your phone from the elements and provides grip.

Helpful Tools: Graphic Design

You don't have to be a graphic design expert to create fun and compelling graphics for social media. There are a number of tools and resources that provide easy-to-use templates and plug and play options. Some are available for free with limited resources and options for fee-based subscriptions that allow you to upgrade and access more tools.

Software	Free Option	Pricing for Paid Features	User Friendly Ranking (1 being very)
Canva	X	\$12.99/mo or 119/year	1
Adobe Express	x	\$9.99/mo	2
Visme	X	\$12.25/mo	3
Vista Create	X	\$10/mo	4
Stencil	X	\$9/mo	5
Snappa	X	\$10/mo	6
Pixlr X	X	\$1 - \$10/mo	7

These are examples for users of this guide to use as a starting point for reference. This does not constitute endorsement of these products by the Aquarium of the Pacific, project collaborators, or the funder. Also note, price points are from 03/23/2023.

Acknowledgements

The Aquarium of the Pacific

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Consultants

Prime Group, LLC conducted the message and content testing that informed the content in this guide. Fat Moon Creative recruited and managed social media influencers who were contracted to test some of the messages and content with their audiences.

- Wen-Tsing Choi, Prime Group LLC
- Cora Hirashiki, Fat Moon Creative
- Rafael Lumang, Fat Moon Creative
- Meagan English, Fat Moon Creative

Stakeholder Advisory Committee

The stakeholder advisory committee provided high level advisement on the messages and content for the latest message and content testing survey and influencer recruitment.

- Afton Vigue, Maine Aquaculture Association
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- Bobbi Hudson, Pacific Shellfish Institute
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- Mark Helvey, Consultant/NOAA Fisheries (retired)

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A person wearing a red jacket is seen from the side, working on a boat. They are harvesting rows of yellow seaweed from the ocean. The water is blue and shimmering with sunlight. A dark blue, torn-edge graphic overlay is positioned in the lower-left foreground, containing the word "Appendices" in white text.

Appendices

Links to Popular Posts

These posts performed best according to the influencers who tested some of the key themes and messages identified in the surveys. It's important to note that their audiences are primarily interested in nutrition and sustainability. Influencer recruitment and testing was coordinated by Fat Moon Creative.

- [Salmon Poke Bowl](#)
- [Blue Foods](#)
- [Sustainable Seafood](#)
- [Seafood Boil](#)
- [Baked Salmon Recipe](#)
- [One Pot Cajun Salmon Pasta](#)

Message Testing Methodology

Nationwide online survey conducted October 27 - November 15, 2021

- Census-representative sample by gender, age, geography, and race/ethnicity.
- 2,036 surveys completed

Respondents rated messages to support the growth and expansion of seafood production in the U.S., and images of seafood production, using Prime Group's M3 testing methodology.

There were no statistically significant variances between regions in terms of the ranking of the messages.

Message Testing Methodology

Respondents select most and least persuasive messages

Each message repeats multiple times & “competes” against different messages

Data output expressed as a “Persuasion Score,” which shows rank order of the messages by effectiveness

Below are four reasons to support the growth and expansion of seafood production in the U.S. On each screen, please read the reasons carefully and then select:

- the single **STRONGEST** reason to support the growth and expansion of seafood production in the U.S.; and
- the single **WEAKEST** reason.

Remember: Select the strongest reason and the weakest reason for each screen.

Please note that by design, the reasons will repeat multiple times across the eight screens.

Strongest Reason		Weakest Reason
<input type="radio"/>	Seafood can be a climate-friendly source of food.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Seafood is full of nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids that can support heart and brain health.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Expanding seafood production in the U.S. reduces our reliance on seafood from other countries.	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Local fisheries and seafood farms support a variety of jobs important to the economy, on boats, in seafood farms, in seafood processing, in restaurants and in grocery stores.	<input type="radio"/>

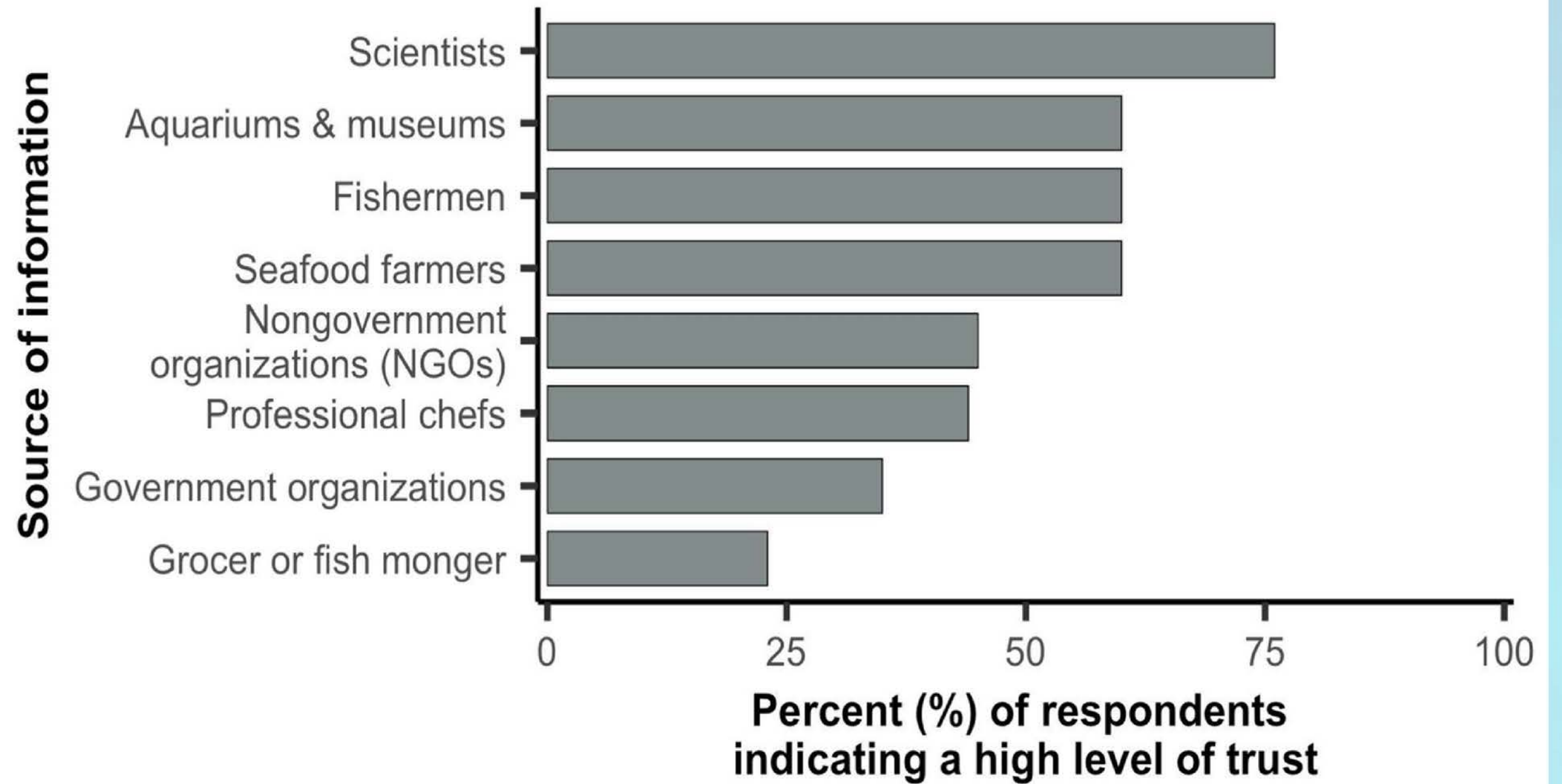
(1 of 8)

Back Next

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<i>M3 Persuasion Scores: Messages in Support of Expanding Seafood Production</i>	Total	NE	MW	West	South
Seafood is full of nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids that can support heart and brain health.	14.6	1	2	1	1
Local fisheries and seafood farms support a variety of jobs important to the economy, on boats, in seafood farms, in seafood processing, in restaurants and in grocery stores.	14.1	2	1	2	2
U.S. fishermen and seafood farmers are held to high standards based on strict federal regulations that protect people, wildlife, and ecosystems.	11.8	3	3	3	3
Fishermen and seafood farmers are among the best stewards of our oceans as they work hard to protect local ecosystems and wildlife.	10.7	4	4	5	4
Local fisheries and seafood farms can provide access to nutritious and affordable foods for underserved communities.	10.3	5	5	6	5
Expanding seafood production in the U.S. reduces our reliance on seafood from other countries.	10.0	7	6	4	6
Seafood is a very stable source of food which is relatively safe from floods, droughts, and other major climate events.	8.8	6	7	7	7
Seafood production is environmentally friendly, requiring little freshwater or land.	7.8	8	8	8	8
Seafood can be a climate-friendly source of food.	6.9	9	9	9	9
The U.S. is a globally recognized leader in sustainable fisheries management.	5.1	10	10	10	10

Scientists, aquariums, fishermen, and seafood farmers are the most trusted messengers



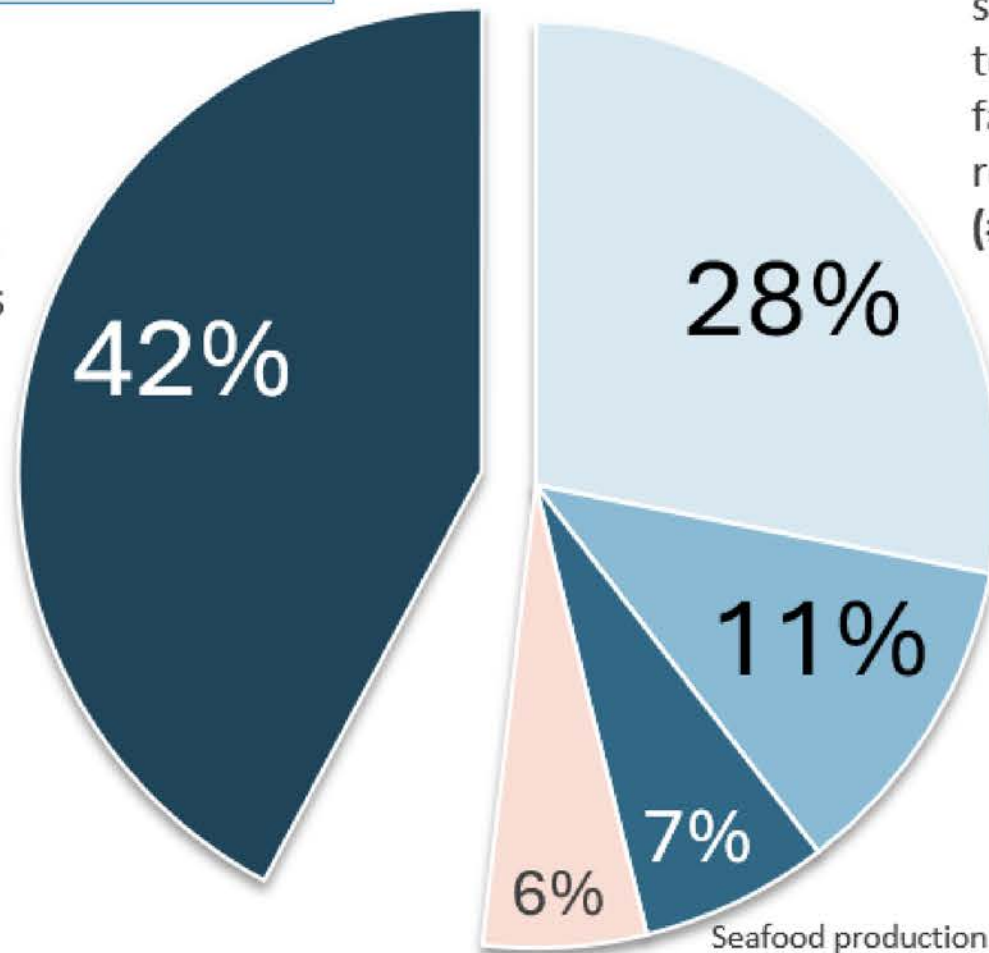
n = 854 to 858 participants

Best messages to reach more people

The optimal five message package reaches **92% of respondents**

(The top three message package reaches 80% of respondents)

Seafood is full of nutrients, including omega-3 fatty acids that can support heart and brain health.
(#1 message by persuasion score)



Local fisheries and seafood farms support a variety of jobs important to the economy, on boats, in seafood farms, in seafood processing, in restaurants and in grocery stores.
(#2 message by persuasion score)

U.S. fishermen and seafood farmers are held to high standards based on strict federal regulations that protect people, wildlife, and ecosystems.
(#3 message by persuasion score)

Expanding seafood production in the U.S. reduces our reliance on seafood from other countries.
(#6 message by persuasion score)

Seafood production is environmentally friendly, requiring little freshwater or land.
(#8 message by persuasion score)