



ALASKA SEAWEED

MARKETING AND
COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Developed for

**ALASKA FISHERIES
DEVELOPMENT
FOUNDATION**



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OVERVIEW

Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) serves the Alaska seafood industry and represents harvesters, processors, and support sector business. AFDF identifies common opportunities in the Alaska seafood industry and develops efficient, sustainable outcomes that provide benefits to the economy, environment, and communities.

AFDF received grant support from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to research and assess the current Alaska seaweed market and industry, and strategize how to invest in Alaska's seaweed industry. The title of this project is "Connecting Alaska Seaweed with New Markets." The overall goal of this grant, which started in 2018, was to formulate a strategy that will increase Alaska seaweed sales to meet or exceed production goals set in the statewide comprehensive plan of 1.2 million pounds within five years (2023).

Rising Tide Communications (RTC) is a full-service marketing, public relations, and strategic communications firm. RTC partnered with AFDF to address objective #2 of the project, which is "to create a marketing communications strategy for future brand development, promotion, and marketing of Alaska seaweed."

INTRODUCTION

As part of the “Connecting Alaska Seaweed with New Markets” project, McKinley Research Group prepared the Alaska Seaweed Market Assessment.

The report verified that seaweed is a growing industry in Alaska, and there has been an increase in seaweed farm applications in Alaska “since commercial seaweed farming began in 2017...” However, the “market demand for most seaweed products is currently limited” due to market competition worldwide, low volume of harvesting supply, and the high price of production costs in Alaska, in addition to other factors. For example, the report states “interview subjects frequently identified the middle of the supply chain as a challenging obstacle to getting seaweed food products to customers. Relationships with distributors are key for placing products into large numbers of retail stores and foodservice outlets.” It concluded that growing, selling, and distributing Alaska Seaweed is in its early stages.

McKinley Research Group’s report also verified interest in learning more about the current Alaska seaweed industry from other seafood industry members in order to identify opportunities that may be available in the coming years. McKinley’s report states, “Alaska’s industry is currently oriented around small volumes of seaweed processed into specialty food products, though multiple operations are presently moving toward larger scales.” In addition, Alaska is under consideration by private and NGO entities with “an interest in or partnering with the state.” With the

partnerships in place, “identifying methods to subsidize research, development, and production will be key to the industry’s continued development.”

The Market Assessment report provides the foundation for important next steps, such as what the Alaska seaweed industry needs in order to be competitive in outside markets, how a brand could build demand, the importance of a brand stewardship, and identifying the audience for the brand.

From analyzing the report and additional interview conversations conducted by McKinley Research, Rising Tide Communications identifies options for potential strategy and future brand development of Alaska Seaweed.

IN THIS REPORT, RISING TIDE COMMUNICATIONS WILL:

→	Summarize key takeaways relevant to brand development, promotion, and marketing from the Alaska Seaweed Market Assessment and industry outreach.
→	Identify additional opportunities for research.
→	Explain the process of creating a brand.
→	Outline three possible brand stewardship audiences and strategies.

POSITIONING STATEMENT

For stakeholders in the Alaska Seaweed industry interested in exploring opportunities presented by an Alaska Seaweed brand, the Alaska Seaweed Marketing Communications Plan offers considerations for brand development, promotion, and marketing of Alaska seaweed.



LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons Learned from the Alaska Seaweed Market Assessment and Industry Outreach

This assessment is an important first step in identifying the current Alaska seaweed market, as well as summarizing the greater U.S. and worldwide markets. The report contains secondary research on seaweed trade, market data, and interviews with 40 seaweed stakeholders in North America and Europe. The report concludes that the Alaska seaweed industry is in its early stages of development. McKinley's Alaska Seaweed Market Assessment is step one of gathering quantitative and qualitative information. The following realities are themes highlighted across stakeholder correspondence:

1. The permitting process poses obstacles to harvesting Alaska seaweed.
2. The demand for Alaska seaweed, specifically from U.S. consumers, is relatively low.
3. Many U.S. consumers have a predisposition of seaweed as slimy, however, they are interested to learn more about the health benefits of consuming it.
4. Alaska's current production costs are higher compared to other parts of the country and the world.
5. The supply of Alaska seaweed needs to either increase dramatically, or the production and distribution price needs to decrease.

Additional Research Needed

The following questions should be considered and addressed to clearly identify obstacles to and opportunities presented by a future Alaska Seaweed brand.

1. Are there any supply issues with harvesting Alaska seaweed? If so, what are they?
2. How can stakeholders and organizations such as AFDF support growers and help increase harvesting yields?
3. What factors are limiting Alaskans from applying for permits to grow wild Alaska seaweed commercially?
4. Who is the potential target audience of the Alaska Seaweed brand?
 - **Domestic consumers:** Need to have a general awareness of Alaska seaweed production and its benefits. Recommend polling to understand current awareness, and to identify and target this audience.
 - **Food wholesalers or distributors:** Need education of brand attributes and benefits of Alaska-sourced seaweed, as well as collateral and other assets to help distinguish Alaska seaweed products.
 - **Seaweed producers and other seafood industries:** Need tools to promote products and assistance making connections throughout the supply chain.
5. How can the Alaska Seaweed brand address potential consumer concerns about environmental contaminants and health implications of Alaska seaweed products?
 - *Example: Proposition 65 requires businesses to provide warnings to Californians about significant exposures to chemicals that cause cancer, birth defects or other reproductive harm. Seaweed is one of the ingredients that is flagged, and if products contain seaweed they must list the prop 65 warning on their packaging.*

DEVELOPING A BRAND

What is a Brand?

- A brand is the idea of a business with which people identify. A brand is defined by advertising guru David Ogilvy as, “The intangible sum of a product’s attributes.”
- Success in branding occurs when a maximum number of people have the same vision of the business as the business holds of itself.
- The look and feel, voice, values, price point, services, partners, and philanthropies all comprise the brand.
- Tangible elements of the brand include brandmark (logo), tagline, typefaces, color palettes, graphics, patterns, photo, and video styles.
- Intangible elements include voice, purpose, personality, and value proposition.

First Step in Creating a Brand

Begin by identifying the following items:

1. Who is the target audience? A target audience is an intended or most likely audience to be interested in a company’s product or service.
2. What are the core values of the brand? Core values are the fundamental beliefs of an organization.
3. What sets the brand apart from its competition?
4. What are the key messages or selling points for this brand?

Telling Your Story

A short description of your background, journey, and why you do what you do will help the audience deepen its understanding of and relationship to the brand.

Focus on the essentials: describe the core functions of the brand and address the who, what, where, when, and how of its foundation and operations.

Power of Identity

The most important function of branding is creating recognition. A strong brand begins with a thoughtful identity that is universally understood by its stakeholders, conveyed to its audiences, and upheld.

The tangible components of the identity (logo, color palette, typefaces, and graphic elements) are the visual representation of the brand personality. A well-executed and consistently applied brand system will do more than just identify — it will become synonymous with the values and mission of the business.

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG BRAND DESIGN

ELEMENTS OF A STRONG BRAND DESIGN	
Distinct	The brand stands out against competitors.
Memorable	The design resonates with your audience and creates a visual impact.
Cohesive	Each element aligns with the brand guidelines and speaks to its core values.
Flexible	The design can grow and evolve as the business grows.
Easy to apply	Elements are intuitive and accessible for the business, designers, and audience.
Authentic	Elements are true to the business personality, message, and place.



BRAND STEWARDSHIP

Before an Alaska Seaweed brand can be launched, a critical step is to identify an organization that will take ownership of the brand and shepherd its growth. Below are three options and examples of organizations that may be well-positioned to act as Alaska Seaweed brand stewards.

1. House the brand within an existing marketing entity.
2. Form a new marketing entity that may explore a variety of funding sources, including seaweed harvester/producer taxes, grants, fundraising, or other financings.
3. Anchor the brand within an existing non-profit organization that has expertise in Alaska's seafood industry.

The following is a discussion of the potential merits and shortcomings of these options, as well as some practical examples that may illuminate which options are best applicable for Alaska Seaweed. →

1.

EXISTING SEAFOOD MARKETING ENTITY

An example of an existing seafood marketing entity that could house the Alaska Seaweed brand is the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute (ASMI). ASMI is a public-private partnership between the State of Alaska and the Alaska seafood industry established to foster the economic development of a renewable natural resource. ASMI plays a key role in the positioning of Alaska's seafood industry as a competitive, market-driven food production industry.

ADVANTAGES

Has its own staff, committees, board members, hired contractors.

An established and well-known brand.

Existing relationships with customers, retailers, distributors, harvesters, government entities, seafood organizations, media, and more.

Functions as a global brand manager of the Alaska Seafood family of brands.

1.

EXISTING SEAFOOD MARKETING ENTITY (CON'T)

CHALLENGES

The overall messaging employed by ASMI's existing brand focuses on Alaska Seafood in general. The entity has minimal resources to develop specific strategies around specific products or species.

ASMI staff market all commercially harvested Alaska seafood species, both domestically and internationally. Therefore, including Alaska seaweed products in their existing list of products would require strategic planning.

ASMI stakeholders would need to determine if Alaska Seaweed fits within Alaska Seafood brand guidelines.

The seaweed sector would have to compete with many other species for staff and budget resources.

New products would require organizational changes as ASMI staff, board members, and committee members are already established in their current positions, tasks, committees, and assignments.

Legislation is required to change state statutes to allow marketing of aquatic farm products; currently, certain legislators have emphasized a need for a funding mechanism to allow for passage of such legislation.

2.

NEW MARKETING ENTITY FUNDED BY PRODUCERS

A not-yet-established example of a new marketing entity funded by producers could be something like the “Alaska Seaweed Marketing Partnership.”

This entity would be funded by producers who are taxed a percentage of their profits. An example of this type of entity is the Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development Association (BBRSDA), which is fleet-funded.

ADVANTAGES

Would specifically focus on the Alaska Seaweed brand.

With dedicated industry knowledge, it could establish itself to stakeholders, the State, investors, the media, etc. as the expert on Alaska Seaweed.

The Alaska Seaweed industry would have more say in the brand development and control over the entity itself.

CHALLENGES

Building this entity would take time.

A party interested in leading this development would need to be secured.

Funding structure dependent on Alaska Seaweed harvesters understanding the organization’s benefit and agreeing to be taxed.

Would compete with other fisheries organizations for State funding.

3.

HOST NON-PROFIT SEAFOOD ORGANIZATION

An example of this organization is AFDF, which represents harvesters, processors, and support sector businesses. AFDF’s mission is to identify common opportunities in the Alaska seafood industry and to develop efficient, sustainable outcomes that provide benefits to the economy, environment and communities. Another potential host organization would be the newly formed Alaska Mariculture Alliance (AMA). AMA’s mission is to develop and support a robust and sustainable mariculture industry, producing shellfish and aquatic plants for the long-term benefit of Alaska’s economy, environment, and communities.

ADVANTAGES

Current investment and interest in the development of an Alaska Seaweed brand.

Already established relationships with Alaska seafood stakeholders and organizations.

CHALLENGES

Immediate and ongoing additional funding is necessary to create and maintain the brand

Would expand AFDF’s current project list and require additional internal capacity.

Limited staff capacity to establish the brand, and may lack marketing experience.

AUDIENCE

Your audiences are the groups of people you want to reach and may include: producers, consumers, state regulators, etc. The more you know about them (their wants, needs, values, etc.), the better you can craft your messages so that they will receive them the way you intend. Similarly, achieving brand goals depends on how well you can tailor your messages to your various audiences.

Knowing this, the potential Alaska Seaweed brand has work to do in clearly defining — and potentially developing — its key audiences in a manner that will lead to sustainable growth. Relationships between Alaska seaweed industry players are currently underdeveloped. Because of this, it's unclear who would most benefit from the implementation of an Alaska Seaweed brand.

Before branding and messaging exercises begin, the brand stewards should explore whether the brand would benefit from existing and established businesses, new businesses — or both. Additionally, consider if wholesalers and processors would benefit from the brand. Interviews with current stakeholders indicated that their foothold in this industry is in constant flux, which makes the industry audiences unclear.

While the industry audiences are being refined, Alaska seaweed brand backers can begin to explore the target consumer audience who would respond positively to an Alaska Seaweed brand.

Identifying a consumer audience can be done by matching brand and product attributes with consumer attributes. For example, this target audience would likely contain the following characteristics:

- Ages 25+
- Health-conscious
- Eco-aware and climate change conscious
- Annual household income over \$100,000
- College degree
- American (Americans demonstrate a strong preference for domestic rather than foreign seafood)

↑ **The more you know about them (their wants, needs, values, etc.), the better you can craft your messages so that they will receive them the way you intend.**

AUDIENCE PROFILES

An audience profile is a fictitious character you model after a member of your target audience in order to help think through the impact and creation of your messages and brand. While an Alaska Seaweed brand would need to undergo more consumer research to fully develop these personas, the following are examples that illustrate how this exercise can inform branding, messaging, marketing investment, and more.





← **BRIAN; the Superfood Fanatic**

Brian is serious about his health and wellness. He's always on the hunt for additions to his dietary regime that will make him sleep better, perform athletically, and feel good. He continually seeks out the latest nutrition research and is already informed of seaweed's mineral content and nutritional benefits. In addition, Brian is a strategic shopper who receives fulfillment when buying products from Alaska that support American jobs.



← **SARA; the Ocean Evangelist**

Sara, a recent college graduate, has grown up in the shadow of climate change. She believes we must act to protect our oceans. While she's already very knowledgeable about sustainable seafood, she wants to go deeper. The eco-friendly properties of seaweed appeal to her — a food that cleans up after itself — is very exciting. She's looking for the cleanest seaweed possible, and she knows Alaska's waters are very pristine. She's interested in seaweed to eat, in her cosmetics, as part of a nutraceutical regime, and more.



← **HECTOR; the Foodie Fan**

Hector is a foodie. He has knives just like the chefs he admires, he subscribes to all the influencer chef Substacks, and he's always looking for interesting ingredients at the market, especially ones from beyond his backyard. He read an article in Bon Appetit about seaweed. He lives far from the ocean, but when he sees an article about foods made from Alaska Seaweed, he immediately places an e-commerce order — eager to try out his latest find.

CORE BRAND VALUES AND ATTRIBUTES

Core values and attributes are the building blocks and essence of the brand. These values help establish and distinguish the brand from others and define how stakeholders and consumers perceive a brand.

Your core brand values are the beliefs that you stand for. They guide your brand story, actions, behaviors, and decision-making process. Brand attributes are characteristics that identify the traits of the brand, both among its industry and customers.



Describing how the brand would ideally be perceived is a good way to start identifying brand values:

- Sustainable
- Supports ocean health
- Socially responsible
- Healthy

Next, list what would set it apart from competitors or parallel markets:

- Alaska seaweed is healthy, sustainable, and regenerative to its environment
- Helps fight climate change
- Alaska has roughly 30,000 miles of coastline
- Focus on a specific species of seaweed

Finally, the core brand attributes will inform the brand's value proposition, voice, look and feel.

- Innovative
- Responsible
- Cool
- Ethical
- Natural
- Forward-thinking
- Sophisticated

Finally, the core brand attributes will inform the brand's value proposition, voice, look and feel.

KEY MESSAGING PILLARS

Targeted messaging will provide consumers with the motivation and knowledge to prioritize and choose seaweed from Alaska in their consumable goods and keep industry audiences unified around a common set of standards.

The value of the brand lies in four core categories: health, eco-friendliness, wholesome, and innovation. This brand is the right choice for consumers who value health, sustainability, nutrition, and progress.

- **Health:** Alaska Seaweed is healthy and nutrient-dense
- **Sustainable:** Alaska Seaweed is sustainable and eco-friendly, and helps fight climate change.
- **Wholesome:** Alaska Seaweed is natural and beneficial, from Alaska's clean, icy-cold waters
- **Innovative:** Alaska Seaweed is the food of the future, providing both environmental and economic benefits, while it nourishes people and our planet.

Key terminology: Fresh, sustainable, domestic, "icy cold waters", abundant, pristine, regenerative, nourishing, wild, contribute to cleaner oceans.

Similar pillars may be developed for use with industry audiences based on the above external messages.

GOALS

COMMUNICATION GOALS

Before outlining “next steps” or tactics the brand will take, first identify and prioritize your goals. The below goals are organized by short-term and long-term, encompassing two distinct phases.

Phase 1 (Year 1-2) Develop Long Term Strategies and Build Foundation

- Increase awareness of Alaska seaweed among consumers and product buyers.
- “An active interest in seaweed from across a host of businesses and global entities” results in private and public investment in research and development.
- An entity is identified to execute the marketing plan.

Phase 2 (Years 2+) Raise Awareness and Strategize Growth

- The Alaska Seaweed brand is identified and recognizable to industry members and potentially long term consumers in the marketplace.
- A marketing strategy is developed that is utilizable/scalable to other states.
- Alaska Seaweed is at the top of mind when investment funds and NGOs focus on global climate change initiatives to push toward net-zero carbon.

However the potential brand steward is chosen by AFDF and Alaska Seaweed stakeholders, the above communications goals need to be addressed by the chosen organization.

IDENTIFYING TACTICS TO MEET GOALS

The identified goals can be addressed in two phases. The tactics noted in the first phase focus on brand development and stakeholder engagement and would take place within the first two years after launch. The second phase focuses on awareness and growth and would take place from years two through four. The following steps, or tactics, will help meet these goals.

Short Term (1-2 Years) Tactics

- Raise awareness of the emerging industry by distributing the Final Seaweed Marketing Report.
 - Industry members (interviewees and non-interviewees)
 - Alaska seafood industry media
- Promote opportunities for current Alaska seaweed harvesters to focus on increasing their kelp supply.
 - Organizations such as AFDF to apply for additional funding
- Support interested Alaska seaweed industry members to apply for permits
- Identify a nonprofit, association, or other organization that can steward an Alaska seaweed brand.
- Develop Alaska seaweed brand standards.

Long Term (2+ Years)

- Strengthen relationships with existing seafood marketing entities.
 - As new research and opportunities arise, focus on consistent correspondence to entities, such as those pushing toward net-zero carbon.
- Engage with seaweed retailers in the adoption and use of the Alaska seaweed brand in stores.
- Support efforts to increase U.S. consumer demand for seaweed products such as through PR campaigns, environmental materials distribution, and digital ads.

This work will rely on the tangible and intangible brand elements described in this report that will present a cohesive tone and mission and maximize effectiveness.



CONCLUSION

Once a brand is clearly defined, articulated, and hosted, the following four strategies will help launch Alaska Seaweed.

Focus on Awareness to Build a Market

Consumers have a strong, positive baseline of knowledge about food from Alaska's waters, vibrant oceans, and its vast coastline. Robust public relations efforts to raise awareness of Alaska's seaweed industry are necessary to build consumer understanding and demand.

Develop Tools for Industry

All players in the Alaska Seaweed supply chain, from harvester to marketer, can benefit from a shared playbook of messaging and facts. Developing fact sheets, buyers guides, talking points, baseline consumer research, strategy addressing Proposition 65, and other shared resources add value to the consumer-facing brand, while also serving as an investment in a roadmap to follow.



Help Consumers Find Seaweed, and Industry Members Find Each Other

Online resources must be launched to help consumers find products and producers offering Alaska Seaweed. They can also serve as a match-making tool, helping producers find customers through a wholesale inquiry function. Many small-scale producers can't afford to invest in trade show attendance or other such ways of finding customers, but helping the industry find them is an essential role the brand can play.

Support and Strengthen Communication Between Industry Members

Tools like a newsletter, landing page, or website, hosted bi-monthly meetings will help get industry members involved and connect groups and organizations throughout the supply chain.

"What we see in the market is that it's a push from the producer side rather than a pull from customers. The demand is just not there yet... Education is needed to drive demand."



Developed by

**RISING TIDE
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