From Tourist To Trusted Consumer: Maine Visitation's Impact On Seafood Consumption, Barrier & Quality Ratings

1865 THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

Rafiul Ahmed*, Melisa Uyar, Dr. Caroline L. Noblet, Dr. Keith S. Evans

School of Economics, University of Maine

DO YOU KNOW?

#8 Maine ranks among U.S. States in **Total Aquaculture Value**[1]

59% **Tourism and Recreation** contribute to Maine's marine economy[2]

64% **Tourists are motivated by Culinary & Food Experiences of Maine**[3]

Research Objectives

Analyzing how **visitation** is associated with **consumption**, knowledge **barriers**, and **perceptions** of aquaculture.

Leveraging the **"Maine/Coastal Visitor Advantage"** to **convert** tourists into **long-term seafood consumers**

Data

2361 Respondents across **Sample**

7 U.S. Major **Metropolitan Cities**
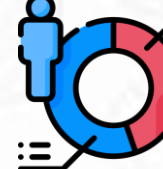

Consumption Behavior | **Perceptions & Barriers** | **Choice Experiment** | **Socio-Demographics**

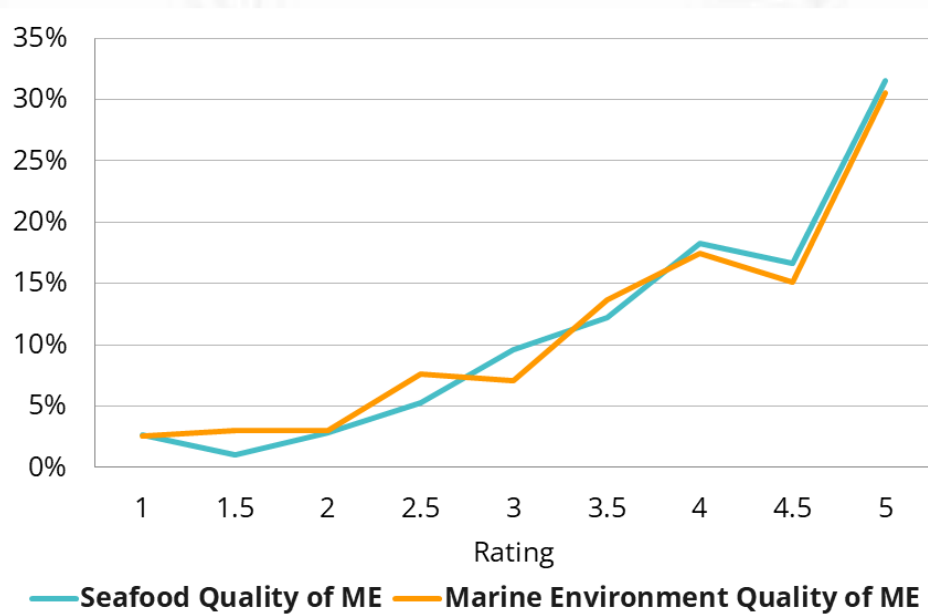## Visitation Profile

44.5% Visited ME

Nearly **44.5%** of the respondents have firsthand Maine experience

More than **Half** of the respondents have visited **at least** one of the four surveyed **coastal hubs** (ME, WA, PEI, or BC)
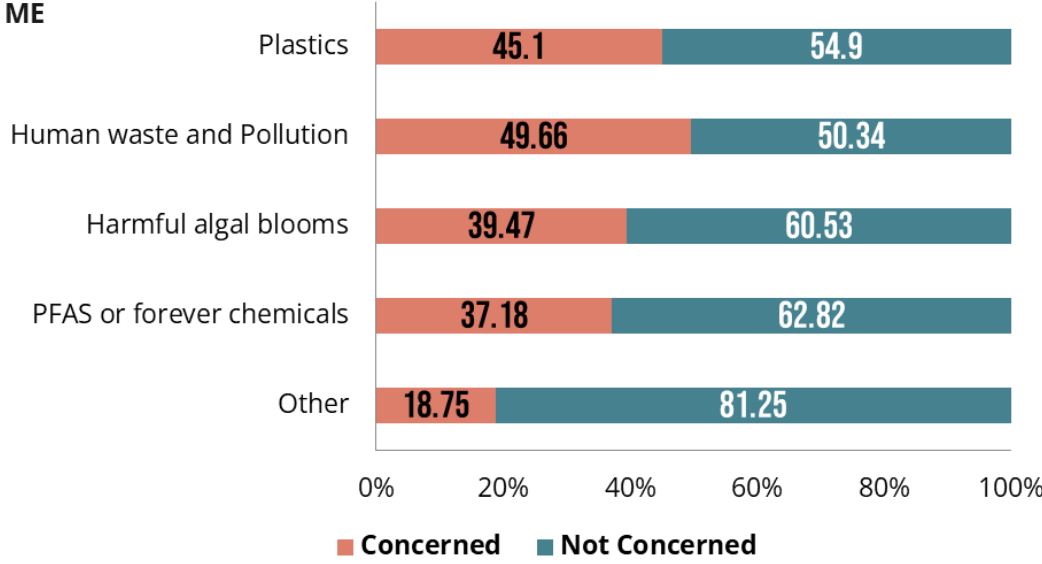
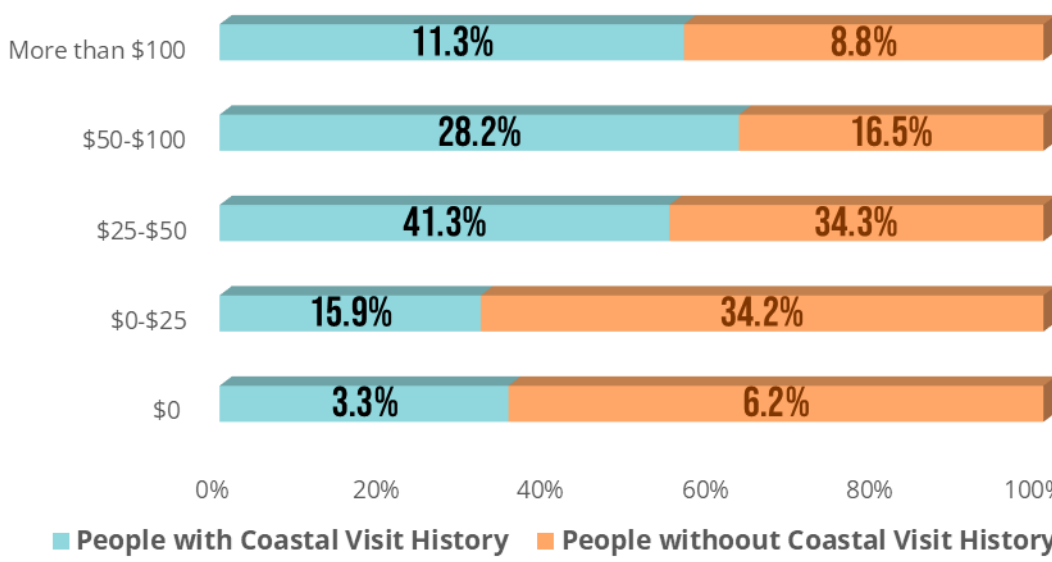**53.6%** Have coastal travel experience

Perception of Aquaculture

In your opinion, what is the quality of the Seafood & Marine Environment of ME?
(1=Lowest Quality, 5= Highest Quality)

— Seafood Quality of ME
— Marine Environment Quality of ME

Are you concerned about any ME Ocean water Quality issues?

	Concerned	Not Concerned
Plastics	45.1	54.9
Human waste and Pollution	49.66	50.34
Harmful algal blooms	39.47	60.53
PFAS or forever chemicals	37.18	62.82
Other	18.75	81.25

Consumption Behavior

Seafood Grocery Spending Distribution by Coastal Visitation History

	People with Coastal Visit History	People without Coastal Visit History
More than $100	11.3%	8.8%
$50-$100	28.2%	16.5%
$25-$50	41.3%	34.3%
$0-$25	15.9%	34.2%
$0	3.3%	6.2%

Monthly Seafood Meal Frequency by Coastal Visit History

	People with Coastal Visit History	People without Coastal Visit History
More than 5 meal	13.6%	14.4%
3-5 meal	21.7%	19.4%
1-3 meal	46.1%	44.5%
0-1 meal	15.0%	17.7%
None	3.6%	4.0%

Seafood Restaurant Spending Distribution by Coastal Visitation History

	People with Coastal Visit History	People without Coastal Visit History
More than $100	22.7%	11.2%
$50-$100	38.0%	25.4%
$25-$50	27.8%	29.8%
$0-$25	9.3%	22.1%
$0	2.2%	11.5%

Seafood Consumption Barriers

Price Barriers
	Low	Med	High
Didn't visit	16.1%	61.6%	22.4%
Visited	30.5%	48.8%	20.7%

Knowledge Barriers
	Low	Med	High
Didn't visit	37.4%	47.1%	15.6%
Visited	24.7%	42.5%	32.8%

Preference Barriers
	Low	Med	High
Didn't visit	44.9%	41.4%	13.7%
Visited	28.8%	38.3%	32.9%

What prevents you from eating/preparing more seafood at home?
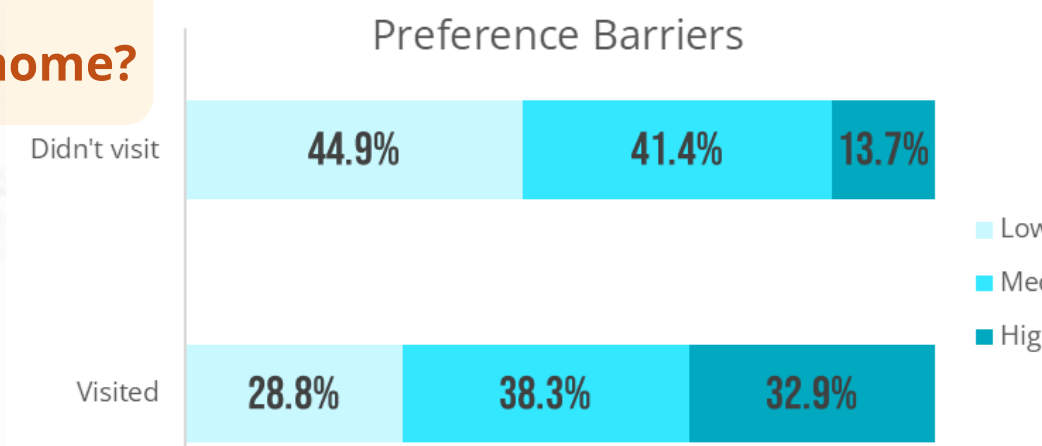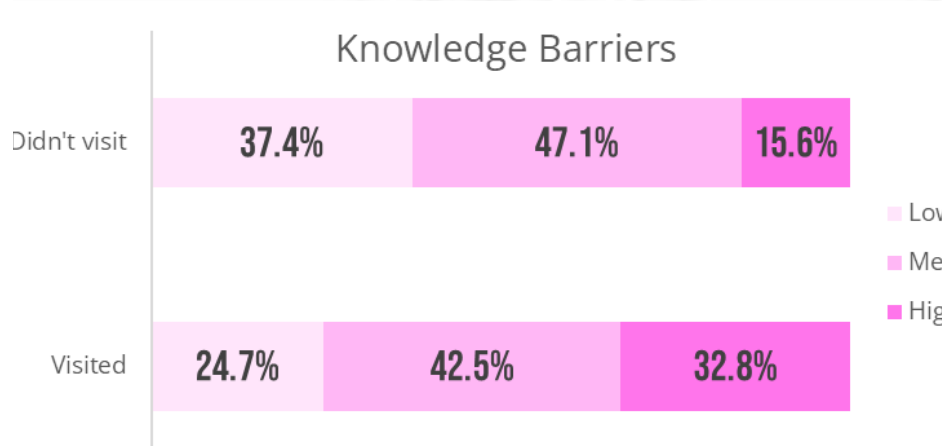
Visitation's Impact & Preliminary Takeaways

Seafood/ Marine Environment Quality of ME = f(visitation history in ME, socio-demographics (Age, Gender, Income as control var.))

| Outcome Variable	Coefficient (p-value)	Note
Rating on Seafood Quality (1 to 5 Star)	0.10 (0.03)	Respondents who visit ME, rate Maine's Seafood **0.10 points more**
Rating on Marine Environment Quality (1 to 5 Star)	0.13 (0.01)	Respondents who visit ME, rate Maine's marine environment **0.13 points more**

Spending on Seafood/ Meals of Seafood = f(Coastal visitation history, socio-demographics (Age, Gender, Income as control var.))

Outcome Variable	Coefficient (p-value)	Note
Grocery seafood spending ($/month, midpoint)	12.71 (<0.001)	Visitors spend about **$13 more** per month **on seafood grocery**
Restaurant seafood spending ($/month, midpoint)	18.59 (p<0.001)	Visitors spend about **$19 more** per month on **restaurant for seafood**
Number of seafood meals at home (meals/month, midpoint)	0.01 (0.91)	**No detectable difference** in number of seafood meal prepared at home
Number of seafood meals at restaurant (meals/month, midpoint)	0.66 (<0.001)	Visitors eat **~0.66 more seafood meals in a restaurant** per month

Consumption Barriers (Price/Knowledge/Preferences)= f(Coastal visitation history, socio-demographics (Age, Gender, Income as control var.))

Outcome Variable	Coefficient (p-value)	Note
Price Barrier	−0.063 (<0.001)	Conditional on demographics, coastal visitation is associated with **lower price barriers** but **higher knowledge and preference barriers** (all p < 0.001)
Knowledge Barrier	0.092 (<0.001)	
Preference Barrier	0.101 (<0.001)	

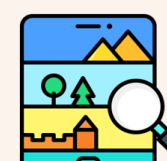## Opportunities for Maine to Lead
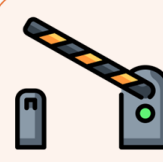
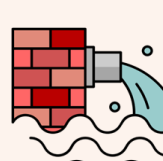**Closing the price & knowledge barrier**

Tailored Strategies to Unlock Demand

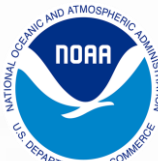**Leverage Maine's Unique Reputation** — Tourism as a Gateway | Clean & Sustainable Branding | Expand high value market

Acknowledgement

Check out references here