



Corporate Control of our Food System

Offshore fish farming, also known as open-ocean aquaculture, is an industry looking to gain traction in the United States. While there are many players involved, some of the largest and most influential are corporate entities.

[Stronger America Through Seafood](#) is an industry bloc aimed at advancing offshore fish farming in the U.S. through lobbying, legislation, and media. Their goal is to fast-track industrial-scale aquaculture and push federal funds into the development of offshore fish farms in pursuit of increased profit. Stronger America Through Seafood membership includes large agribusiness, pharmaceutical, and foodservice companies like Cargill, Merck, and Sysco, as well as offshore fish farming companies, such as Ocean Era, Manna Farms, and Blue Ocean Mariculture.

[The Coalition for Sustainable Aquaculture](#) sounds benign, but it is another industry trade group comprised of self-proclaimed environmentalists, fish farming companies, big tech, and chefs. Their mission is to build a coalition in support of offshore aquaculture in the United States. The members include Environmental Defense Fund, Hubbs-SeaWorld, and Blue Ocean Mariculture. For years, the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute has been seeking to create a fish farm just beyond California state waters with the help of a venture capital firm.

There are also some offshore fish farming proponents who are not members of either coalition. One of the largest is Cooke Aquaculture, a Canadian company with operations in several countries, including the United States. Cooke Aquaculture has been expanding its offshore fish farming operations in recent years, and has faced criticism and legal challenges related to its environmental impact and regulatory compliance. Most notably, Cooke Aquaculture was responsible for an August 2017 leak of over 260,000 Atlantic Salmon into the Puget Sound. Now, it is looking to expand operations in Maine, as well as move inland.



Many of these large companies operate under smaller ones. For example, [Cooke Aquaculture](#) is the parent company to a long list of acquired organizations and is currently the majority stakeholder in Nueva Pescanova, a multinational fishing and aquaculture corporation. Neil Sims is the owner of three separate offshore aquaculture companies: Blue Ocean Mariculture, Ocean Era Hawai'i, and the planned Velella Epsilon facility off of Sarasota, FL. With so many different companies and names to operate under, it can be hard to know who exactly is behind various proposed offshore aquaculture operations.

Foreign interest in developing our waters extends beyond Cooke, with Scandinavian firms also making their mark. [American Aquafarms](#), a Norwegian company, has thus far been unsuccessful in its attempt to establish offshore aquaculture in Maine, after three years of fighting against local communities. [Nordic Aquafarms](#), a Norwegian and Danish company, has set its sights on building coastal land-based fish farms with waste discharge pipes into the ocean in Belfast, ME and Humboldt, CA. These intrusive ventures by foreign corporations highlight the disconcerting reality of our waters being targeted for profit.

Major agribusinesses are transferring the terrestrial industrial agriculture model to the oceans through industrial fish farming - which can be described as floating CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations). Cargill is one of the world's largest suppliers of animal feed, including fish feed. They produce aquafeed for several fish species that are commonly farmed on an industrial scale. Bayer and Merck are pharmaceutical companies that produce veterinary products, vaccines, and antibiotics for livestock and fish. Agribusiness and pharmaceutical companies may play a key role in shaping the regulatory environment for aquaculture through their lobbying efforts and other forms of influence.

The consolidation of power within the offshore aquaculture industry raises concerns about environmental impacts, regulatory compliance, and the influence of corporate interests. As this industry continues to grow, it is crucial to carefully balance the economic benefits with sustainable practices and robust regulatory oversight to ensure the long-term health of our oceans and the communities that depend on them. We need to take the power out of the hands of large corporations and put it back into the hands of coastal communities and small-scale fisherfolk. These are the communities that have proven themselves to be effective stewards of the ecosystems they rely on, and the ones who will ensure a sustainable future for our native fisheries.

