

Aquaculture Research

UMaine Makes a Concrete Commitment

BY AARON PORTER

FRANKLIN — The walls are up and the roof is going on at the University of Maine's new 24,000-square-foot aquaculture research facility on Taunton Bay. By all accounts, the expansion is coming just in time.

Nick Brown, who manages the Center for Cooperative Aquaculture Research, said the demand from industry partners looking for research space is high, and that's what the center is all about.

For the past four years, the facility has been housed in a converted commercial fish farm the university bought from farm creditors in late-1999. Currently, the old shore-based farm is home to research into the commercial potential of halibut, cod,

sea worm and seaweed cultivation.

"And we don't even have the building yet," said Jake Ward, executive director of research and economic development for the University of Maine.

He said completion of the new building by January or February 2005 is essential because of the 11,000 juvenile halibut just brought in from Canada by new industry partner Maine Halibut Farms Inc. There's space for them in the old farm while they're young, but they will be growing and will need the new space by winter.

That new space is more than just room for tanks of fish to grow. Brown said the new facility offers advantages of a controlled environment and a flexi-

ble space designed for research.

"What we don't have here is environmental control," he said, looking around the old fish farm structure. In the new building, "we'll be able to dial in temperature," he said.

The filtering, chilling and heating systems will allow the air and water conditions to be carefully controlled. In addition, he said, the building would be more hygienic, designed to allow for easy wash downs and climate control. The spaces available for research allow for at least two distinct and secure areas to house different research projects. Brown said separate entrances amount to better biosecurity as researchers can't traipse from one lab directly into another. He summed the new

building up as "a bit more like a hospital than a farm."

In addition to space for the fish to be grown, the new facility will have a designated space for production of the minute brine shrimp and rotifers used to feed the tiny halibut in the earliest independent stages of life. At the other end of the scale, there will be space to hose and maintain the brood stock of large halibut. Brown and his staff have acquired from the wild and nursed into reproductivity over the last few years.

Brown stressed the flexibility of the facility. That's essential to a laboratory space that's intended to do meet the needs of an industry that's as broadly defined and quick to

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NICK BROWN

Pieces of the puzzle come together as the walls go up at the University of Maine's Center for Cooperative Aquaculture Research in Franklin.

