Developed and proposed by: The Aquatic Food Production Systems Program Team

Position title: Coastal Food Systems Advisor

Headquarter location and coverage area: The proposed headquarters for this position is the UCCE Sonoma County Office. Sonoma County is centrally located within the proposed coverage area of Sonoma, Marin, and Mendocino Counties and provides access to key coastal communities, seafood businesses, working waterfronts, and marine resource stakeholders. Programmatic responsibilities may extend throughout California's North Coast as needed.

Discussions with the UC Davis Coastal and Marine Sciences Institute and Bodega Marine Laboratory have identified an opportunity to develop shared workspace and programmatic access at Bodega Marine Laboratory while maintaining the advisor's administrative headquarters and professional identity within the UCCE county-based system. This arrangement would allow the advisor to remain embedded in Cooperative Extension while accessing marine facilities, seawater systems, field infrastructure, technical expertise, and coastal science collaborators needed to support applied research and extension in seafood systems and marine food production.

Position overview, briefly describe: This position will develop an applied research and extension program focused on coastal food systems, sustainable seafood economies, and working waterfront resilience. The advisor will support seafood producers, fishing communities, Tribes, seafood businesses, local governments, harbor districts, and community organizations through science-based education, technical assistance, and collaborative research addressing seafood production, value-added processing, distribution systems, marine food production, climate adaptation, and coastal economic diversification.

Applicants for this position should hold a minimum of a master's degree in fisheries, aquaculture, marine science, coastal resource management, food systems, agricultural and resource economics, community development, environmental science, or a closely related field by the time of appointment. Specialty and/or professional experience should demonstrate the capacity or potential to develop collaborative research and extension programs consistent with the mission and values of Cooperative Extension.

Justification: California's North Coast supports some of the state's most important fishing communities, seafood businesses, working waterfronts, and marine food production opportunities. These coastal economies are experiencing significant transition as a result of changing ocean conditions, shifting fisheries, regulatory complexity, infrastructure constraints, workforce challenges, and evolving market demands.

At the same time, state and federal investment is increasing in domestic seafood production, regional seafood infrastructure, climate adaptation, Tribal food sovereignty, seafood processing capacity, and marine aquaculture. Coastal stakeholders are seeking science-based guidance to evaluate emerging opportunities while maintaining environmentally responsible and economically viable seafood systems.

Despite these growing needs, UC ANR currently lacks dedicated Cooperative Extension capacity focused on coastal food systems and seafood economies. Existing marine science programs and research institutions generate important scientific knowledge, but there is currently no county-based Cooperative Extension academic specifically tasked with translating research into practical solutions for seafood producers, fishing communities, seafood businesses, harbor districts, Tribes, and local governments.

The proposed partnership with Bodega Marine Laboratory creates a unique opportunity to integrate Cooperative Extension programming with one of the nation's premier coastal research facilities. This arrangement would provide direct access to marine science expertise, field infrastructure, seawater systems, and demonstration opportunities while maintaining the advisor's county-based Cooperative Extension identity and stakeholder focus.

The top issues addressed by this position are:

1. Sustainable seafood and marine food production systems, including shellfish, seaweed, urchin ranching, and other emerging ocean-based food systems;

2. Applied research and technical assistance for seafood producers, fishing communities, seafood businesses, working waterfronts, and regional seafood value chains; and
3. Climate adaptation and resilience strategies for fisheries-dependent communities, seafood enterprises, and coastal economies responding to ocean change and market disruption.

This position directly supports UC ANR Strategic Vision 2040 priorities related to sustainable food systems, thriving communities, climate resilience, healthy ecosystems, and economic prosperity by advancing science-based solutions that strengthen California's coastal food systems and seafood economies.

Extension: Potential clientele groups include commercial fishermen, seafood producers, shellfish and seaweed growers, seafood processors, seafood distributors, harbor districts, Tribes, community organizations, local governments, economic development organizations, regional food system partners, and residents within the counties of responsibility.

Extension activities will include stakeholder needs assessments, producer education, technical assistance, workshops, demonstration projects, field days, webinars, decision-support tools, seafood value chain analyses, policy and planning briefings, and regional convenings focused on coastal food systems and seafood economies.

Expected extension products include UC ANR publications, technical guides, producer-oriented factsheets, workshops, webinars, needs assessment reports, seafood value chain assessments, decision-support tools, and stakeholder-focused educational materials.

Research: Key research areas may include:

• Sustainable seafood and marine food production systems, including shellfish, seaweed, urchin ranching, and other emerging ocean-based food production opportunities;
• Seafood value chains, processing infrastructure, direct marketing, regional distribution systems, and seafood business viability;
• Climate adaptation and resilience strategies for fisheries-dependent communities, seafood enterprises, and working waterfronts; and
• Economic diversification, stakeholder decision-support tools, and community planning approaches that strengthen coastal food systems and marine resource-based livelihoods.

Research outputs may include peer-reviewed publications, UC ANR publications, California Agriculture articles, technical reports, extension briefs, decision-support tools, conference presentations, and stakeholder-facing publications.

UC ANR network: The advisor will collaborate with UC ANR advisors and specialists in food systems, community economic development, climate adaptation, natural resources, and aquaculture, as well as AES faculty and researchers affiliated with UC Davis, Bodega Marine Laboratory, and California Sea Grant.

While substantial marine science expertise exists within the University of California system, there is currently no Cooperative Extension academic dedicated to coastal food systems and seafood economies. This position would create an important bridge between marine science research and the practical needs of seafood producers, fishing communities, seafood businesses, harbor districts, and coastal communities.

The advisor would contribute to and collaborate with existing UC ANR efforts related to food systems, community and economic development, climate adaptation, natural resource management, and aquaculture while expanding UC ANR's ability to serve California's coastal stakeholders.

Network external to UC ANR: External collaborators and partner organizations may include commercial fishing associations, seafood producers, seafood processors and distributors, harbor districts, Tribes, coastal and marine nonprofit organizations, regional food system organizations, economic development organizations, Resource Conservation Districts, local governments, state and federal agencies, and organizations involved in fisheries management, aquaculture permitting, seafood infrastructure, climate resilience, and marine resource stewardship.

Support: The Area Director for Sonoma, Napa, and Marin Counties has confirmed support for this position and will provide office space, office supplies, and administrative support. The Area Director for Mendocino and Lake Counties has also confirmed support for this position.

In addition, leadership from the UC Davis Coastal and Marine Sciences Institute and Bodega Marine Laboratory have identified opportunities to develop shared workspace and programmatic access at Bodega Marine Laboratory. This arrangement would provide access to coastal and marine research facilities, seawater systems, field sites, technical infrastructure, and marine science collaborators.

Other support: Potential funding sources include state and federal programs supporting domestic seafood production, seafood processing capacity, coastal resilience, climate adaptation, marine aquaculture, regional food systems, working waterfronts, economic development, and Tribal food sovereignty.

Potential funding and partnership sources may include California Sea Grant, NOAA, the US and CA Department of Food and Agriculture, USDA NIFA Western Regional Aquaculture Center the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Ocean Protection Council and Coastal Conservancy, harbor districts, regional economic development organizations, philanthropic foundations, conservation organizations, seafood industry partners, and Tribal organizations. The advisor's connection to both UCCE and the Bodega Marine Laboratory would make the position particularly competitive for grants that combine stakeholder engagement, applied research, demonstration, and extension education.