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**Maine Food Producers Alliance to Strengthen Industry Cluster**  
*Funding Support comes from Maine Technology Institute Cluster Initiative Program*

**(Augusta, ME)** – A group of Maine-based organizations - including the Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), the Maine Grocers Association (MGA) and the Maine Food Producers Alliance, – announce they will collaborate to promote the growth of the state’s value-added food producers.

The Maine Food Producers Alliance (MFPA) will reorganize from the strengths of the former Maine Gourmet and Specialty Food Producers organization to build a network that will catalyze the growth of the food production cluster in Maine. The Maine Technology Institute’s Cluster Initiative Program award of \$458,922 with outside match funding of \$680,268 will support the Alliance’s initial efforts to begin in April, 2009.

“This is a shining moment for Maine’s food industry. The award recognizes small business leaders who are the backbone of the Maine economy, and I look forward to working alongside of them,” said Shelley Doak, Executive Director of the Maine Grocers Association.

“The Maine Grocers Association Board of Directors spent much of its 2008 strategic planning efforts finding ways to develop partnerships with food producers and processors,” said Barbara Davidson, President of the Maine Grocers Association Board of Directors. “This grant award could not be timelier as Maine consumers demonstrate rising interest in locally grown food and value-added food products.”

The Alliance will develop growth opportunities for Maine’s food producers initially through the development of collaborative marketing and distribution processes and systems. Their efforts will also include exposure of Maine specialty food branding and a promotional partnership with The Chef’s Kitchen television show. The show is produced and filmed in Edgecomb, Maine with a weekly viewership of over 20 million.

“This opportunity will fundamentally change the way a value-added producer can do business and prosper in the State of Maine and beyond,” said Marnee Robinson of Marnee’s Cookies and member of the Maine Food Producers Alliance steering committee. “The emergence of the Maine Specialty Food Cluster will undoubtedly have an immediate impact for everyone and the scope of growth potential is significant.”

It is estimated that the value-added food industry in Maine supports over 200 food manufacturers and employs over 6,000 workers throughout the state. As is typical with Maine manufacturers the vast majority of these companies are family-owned, small businesses. Working within the cluster framework, Maine food manufacturers can improve the effectiveness of their overall

infrastructure, resources, and networks by focusing on collaborative efforts to open national markets, to build on Maine's unique quality of life brand, and to strengthen existing relationships with industry support organizations.

"For over the past two years, the Maine MEP has been working with value-added food manufacturers and the economic development community to strengthen the food production cluster. It has been a pleasure working with this passionate group and we look forward to taking all stakeholders to the next level with this MTI award," said Rosemary Presnar, Operations Manager for Maine MEP.

### **About Maine MEP**

Maine MEP is an affiliate of the NIST under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The national MEP is a network of manufacturing extension centers that provide business and technical assistance to smaller manufacturers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Through MEP, manufacturers have access to more than 2000 manufacturing and business "coaches" whose job is to help firms make changes that lead to greater productivity, increased profits, and enhanced global competitiveness. For more information on the Maine MEP program call 1-800-637-4634 or visit [www.mainemep.org](http://www.mainemep.org)

### **About MGA**

The Maine Grocers Association was formed in 1935 and serves as the principal business trade association representing retailers, wholesalers and distributors in the Maine food industry. The MGA provides its members a full range of services covering communications, governmental affairs, education and networking. For more information on MGA, services and memberships call 1-888-821-3335 or visit [www.mainegrocers.org](http://www.mainegrocers.org)

### **About The Chef's Kitchen**

"The Chef's Kitchen" began filming in Maine in October 2007 after years of being based in Philadelphia. Steven Horn, director of the show, has partnered with Maine restaurateur and developer Roger Bintliff to create a new "culinary arts campus" in Edgecomb. The show airs locally on WMTW(8)-ABC every Saturday at 12:30 p.m. It can be seen online weeknights at 5 p.m. on the Comcast Network ([www.cn8.tv/](http://www.cn8.tv/)). For more information and upcoming shows visit [www.chefskitchen.tv](http://www.chefskitchen.tv)

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