



For Immediate Release

October 15, 2025

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100% Great Lakes Fish Initiative receives award from United Nations

Initiative recognized with “Blue Transformational Leader Award for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems” during Oct. 15 World Food Forum in Rome

(ROME, Italy)—The 3-year-old 100% Great Lakes Fish initiative, led by the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers (GSGP), has received the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) Blue Transformation Leader award for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems. GSGP program manager John Schmidt accepted the award on behalf of GSGP and its partners at FAO headquarters in Rome on October 15, as part of the organization’s 80th anniversary celebrations and the 2025 World Food Forum (WFF).

This honor recognizes the international initiative’s collaborative efforts to promote full utilization of fish and drive sustainable blue-economy growth across our region.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger and improve nutrition and food security. It was founded 80 years ago in Québec City.

The WFF is a week-long event that brings together over 25,000 people, including heads of state and government, Ministers, and leaders from the private sector, civil society, international organizations, and other stakeholders in agrifood systems. It is a global platform that showcases innovative ideas, such as the 100% Great Lakes Fish Initiative, to drive action at the international, regional, and local levels.

As part of the 100% Great Lakes Fish initiative, GSGP created the 100% Great Lakes Fish Pledge, where commercial fish processors, aquaculture producers, and related companies commit to

fully utilize 100% of each fish they process, raise, or handle by the end of this year. The Pledge has already recruited 44 fish processors and aquaculture farms, representing about 90% of all commercially caught fish from the Great Lakes, from seven states and two Canadian provinces.

“On behalf of the 100% Fish Pledge Initiative, we thank the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization for this prestigious recognition,” **said David Naftzger, Executive Director of GSGP.** “For a nascent initiative to receive this type of recognition is very encouraging for us as it indicates we are on the right path toward reducing waste while maximizing the value of our region’s fish resources.”

The Great Lakes region is home to sizeable commercial, recreational, and Tribal fisheries as well as growing aquaculture operations, but only about 40% of each fish (the fillets) is usually eaten. In contrast, the remaining 60% of the fish is often relegated to inexpensive uses or discarded. The 100% Great Lakes Fish initiative seeks new and innovative ways to fully use each fish to reduce waste, create more value and jobs, and support rural economic development. Iceland pioneered this approach and has seen the value of products made from each cod skyrocket from \$12 (us) for just the filet to a remarkable \$5,000 (us) for products including cosmetics, medical bandages, nutritional supplements, and a range of other products.

More information on 100% Great Lakes Fish, including a copy of the Pledge, is available at <https://gsgp.org/projects/100-great-lakes-fish/>.

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About the Conference of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers

www.gsgp.org

The Conference of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers unites the chief executives from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania, Québec and Wisconsin. The Governors and Premiers work as equal partners to grow the region’s \$9.3 trillion (us) economy and protect the world’s largest surface freshwater system.