



SELLING SEAFOOD IN GEORGIA

**How to start a seafood business or expand
your operation to include seafood products.**



Do you want to tap into the popularity of local foods by selling Georgia seafood to restaurants or consumers? Have you developed a seafood product that consumers are eager to buy?

This guide outlines [what it takes to start a seafood business in Georgia](#) or [expand an existing food business to include seafood products](#).

Retailers and Wholesalers

In Georgia, there are two main types of seafood dealers:

Retailers *sell or serve* products directly to end users (consumers). Retailers such as grocery stores, farmers markets, seafood and other stores *sell* food to consumers to take elsewhere to eat or cook. They are regulated by the Georgia Department of Agriculture retail food program. Restaurants and caterers are retail food *service* establishments. They are regulated by the Georgia Department of Public Health through county environmental health departments. *(for more information about retail food service establishments, consult dph.georgia.gov/food-service.)*

Wholesalers sell products to retailers and other wholesalers, but not directly to consumers. They are regulated by Georgia Department of Agriculture's manufactured food program.

*Note: Georgia Department of Agriculture issues licenses to cottage food facilities, which are facilities where food is prepared in personal home kitchens and sold to consumers. However, seafood and other animal-based foods **cannot be produced under a cottage food license** because they must be refrigerated to prevent growth of bacteria that can make consumers sick.*



Steps to Start a Thriving Seafood Business

Step 1: Obtain Appropriate Licenses and Registration

To comply with state and federal laws and ensure food safety, the first step is determining what licenses, registrations or permits you need. Depending on the product(s) you sell, there are five state and federal government agencies that oversee companies growing, storing, manufacturing (processing), or selling seafood in Georgia and may require licenses or registration. Contact the agencies listed below before applying to ensure you get the correct license(s).

- **Georgia Dept. of Agriculture Food Safety Division** (*Manufactured Food, Retail Food, and Seafood Safety Sections*); agr.georgia.gov/foodsafety
- **Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources** (DNR; *Coastal Resources, Wildlife Resources, Law Enforcement [Special Permits Unit], and Environmental Protection Divisions*) – growing or harvesting seafood; wastewater discharge from processing or aquaculture production; gadnr.org/divisions; Aquaculture – gadnrle.org/special-permits
- **Georgia Dept. of Revenue** – collects sales tax on products sold to consumers; go to gtc.dor.ga.gov to register a new business and obtain a sales tax identification number.
- **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** – food facility registration; regulates all seafood products except freshwater catfish; fda.gov/seafood
- **U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS)** – freshwater catfish growing and processing; fsis.usda.gov/siluriformes

You will also need an occupational tax permit (local business license) from the city or county in which your business is based. Other local permits and licenses may be needed, especially if you plan to operate or build a processing or storage facility. **Use the table on the following page to determine which licenses you might need.**

If you buy raw seafood harvested in nearby states to sell in Georgia, you may need additional permits or licenses from those states. This is especially important if you buy species that are illegal to commercially harvest in Georgia.

Changing or Expanding Your Business or Products: No matter what type of business you start, if you want to expand it to sell to restaurants instead of just consumers, or go from selling raw seafood to producing a cooked product, you should consult the Georgia Department of Agriculture first. You might need additional licenses, variances or training in order to move forward. If you aren't properly licensed and cause consumer illnesses, you may be held liable.

Licenses that *May** Be Required for Commercial Seafood Businesses in Georgia

	Georgia Dept. of Agriculture (GDA)				Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources (DNR)					
I want to:	Food Sales Establishment (Retail and/or Wholesale)	Mobile Vehicle (Retail and/or Wholesale)	(Molluscan**) Shellfish Sanitations Certification	Wholesale Fish	Aquaculture Registration	Fish Dealer (Retail or Wholesale)	Wild Animal License (WAL)	Seafood Dealer	Commercial Fishing & Vessel	Master Collector/Harvester Permit
Commercially harvest (1) or buy raw seafood (except molluscan shellfish) from commercial harvesters and sell it from enclosed vehicle roadside or at farmers markets to consumers		✓						✓	✓ (1)	
Manufacture seafood product(s) and sell to consumers	✓									
Open a market and sell seafood to consumers and retailers	✓		✓	✓						
Grow non-native fish (like tilapia) in tanks or ponds to harvest and sell live (without heading or gutting) to retailers						✓ or -->	✓			
Grow non-native fish (like tilapia) in tanks or ponds; harvest, remove head and/ or guts, store and/or package for sale to consumers and retailers	✓			✓		✓ or -->	✓			
Buy raw seafood (except molluscan shellfish) from harvesters and transport/sell directly to other businesses without storing or processing it				✓						
Buy and store seafood and sell to retailers and wholesalers	✓		✓	✓						
Grow oysters and/or clams at the Georgia coast to sell retail (2) & wholesale	✓		✓	✓				✓ (2)	✓	✓

* This table provides basic guidance only and does not cover all scenarios. Contact GDA and/or GA Dept. of Natural Resources employees who work in your area or regulate your type of business to convey your proposed ideas and activities to receive guidance specific for your operation.

** Molluscan shellfish includes fresh or frozen oysters, clams, mussels, whole or roe-on scallops.

Step 2: Abide by Food Sanitation and Safety Regulations

In addition to obtaining appropriate license(s), you may need to comply with state and federal food safety-related laws.

- FDA's Current Good Manufacturing Practices (CGMP) dictate sanitary conditions and actions necessary for processing, packaging and storing food to ensure its safety and wholesomeness. (*Code of Federal Regulations Title 21 Part 117 Subpart B*)
- Seafood processors must comply with sanitation control procedures (SCPs) which require monitoring, record-keeping, and correcting deficiencies in eight key sanitation areas.
- FDA's seafood Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) regulation requires you to analyze your food processes and products for potential hazards and implement a HACCP plan to prevent, eliminate, or minimize significant hazards. Developing and modifying seafood HACCP plans and conducting mandatory weekly reviews of records is complicated, therefore training is required. Consult the "Industry" section at [fda.gov/seafood](https://www.fda.gov/seafood).
- Retailers who perform specific handling activities and sell food requiring time/temperature control must have at least one employee with supervisory responsibilities trained as a [Certified Food Protection Manager \(CFPM\)](#).
- Because molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, and whole or roe-on scallops) are frequently consumed raw, additional regulations through the National Shellfish Sanitation Program apply. Consult the "Industry" section at [fda.gov/seafood](https://www.fda.gov/seafood).
- Contact employees within Georgia Department of Agriculture's food safety program(s) relevant to your operation to find out which laws pertain to you (agr.georgia.gov/foodsafety).



Step 3: Take Advantage of Available Resources

After obtaining required licenses, permits and registrations, the **University of Georgia** has several programs that can provide technical support and assistance to help make your new business or product a reality.

Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant Seafood Office – seafood HACCP training and advice; free enrollment in GeorgiaSeafood.org (online directory) to promote your company; gacoast.uga.edu/seafood

Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant Shellfish Research Lab – technical support for saltwater molluscan shellfish (clams, oysters) growers; gacoast.uga.edu/aquaculture

Food Product Innovation and Commercialization Center – helps companies take new products from concept through consumer research, formulation, packaging, prototyping, shelf-life analysis, nutritional labeling, and market launch; foodpic.uga.edu

Food Science and Technology Extension – food safety training/workshops; in-plant food safety or sanitation audits/consultations; extension.uga.edu/programs-services/food-science.html

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Aquaculture Unit – technical support for freshwater aquatic animal producers; aquaculture.caes.uga.edu

College of Family and Consumer Sciences – ServSafe® Manager Certification program (for Certified Food Protection Manager) – www.fcs.uga.edu/extension/food-foodservice

Small Business Development Center – 17 Georgia offices offer training/assistance in operations, finance, marketing, & human resources for small-business entrepreneurs. Helps businesses develop plans to: analyze potential markets, secure start-up funding, manage taxes, and grow; georgiasbdc.org

Grateful appreciation for help in developing this guide goes to
Krissa Jones, Manufactured Food Program Manager, Georgia Dept. of Agriculture



**Marine Extension and
Georgia Sea Grant**
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



gacoast.uga.edu

Publication supported by Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant. All views, opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant.