

Clean Water, Stronger Coasts: How Two Rural Development Investments Support a Healthier Casco Bay

The Town of Freeport sits along the Harraseeket River, a northern arm of Casco Bay. Just a few miles away in Brunswick, Mere Point Oyster Company grows shellfish in the clear, fast-moving waters of Maquoit and Mere Point Bays, waters that are considered some of the most ecologically significant in Maine. Although these communities are separate, they are tied together by a single reality: healthy coastal waters sustain both public health and local livelihoods.

USDA Rural Development programs are often thought of as separate tools for separate needs, water infrastructure in one place, business support in another. But in coastal Maine, two different Rural Development investments are working together in ways that strengthen an entire watershed.

“This is Rural Development at work,” said **USDA Rural Development Maine State Director John Butera**. “We assist communities with critical infrastructure upgrades, we help small businesses grow, and we support the people who rely on both.”

Protecting Casco Bay from Aging Infrastructure

In Freeport, some of the equipment at the Freeport Sewer District’s wastewater treatment plant has been running for nearly 50 years, more than double its useful life. Outdated pumps, aging processes, and wear throughout the collection system posed risks not only to efficiency and service reliability, but also to the health of the Harraseeket River and Casco Bay.

Using a combination of USDA Rural Development loan and grant funding totaling \$20.1 million through the [Water and Environmental Programs](#), the district is now undertaking a major modernization effort. These upgrades will:

- Increase treatment capacity
- Address long-overdue repairs
- Reduce health and sanitary concerns
- Support future economic development in Freeport

This project reflects the district’s top priorities and positions the plant to serve residents and local businesses for decades to come.

A Stronger Marine Economy, One Oyster at a Time

Down the coast, Dan and Doug, founders of Mere Point Oyster Company, also depend on clean, stable marine conditions. Their business began as an effort to strengthen local marine ecosystems and provide new opportunities for working waterfront families. Both men wanted to improve

shellfish populations, support environmental health, and create a future for their children on the coast of Maine.

With help from a USDA [Value-Added Producer Grant](#) of \$207,805, the company expanded its capacity to market and distribute its oysters. What began with 10,000 oysters in the first year has grown into a thriving business supplying markets, restaurants, and customers nationwide. Their oysters filter up to 50 gallons of seawater per day, helping to keep the water cleaner for other marine life and enhancing the health of the bays they farm.

Mere Point Oyster Company's commitment to sustainability and community mirrors the very purpose of the [USDA Business Programs](#) that supported their growth.

"These projects show how strategic investments can make a big difference for local communities: a reality clearly shown in both Freeport's infrastructure upgrades and the growing oyster operations in Brunswick," said **Butera**.

Two Different Programs, One Shared Outcome

Though these two projects fall under different Rural Development programs, they share a common impact: healthier water systems that strengthen marine habitats, coastal economies, and rural communities.

- The Freeport Sewer District upgrades reduce potential pollution risks, protecting the Harraseeket River and, ultimately, Casco Bay.
- The Mere Point Oyster Company relies on those same waters to grow a clean, sustainable food source and support Maine's working waterfronts.
- One investment safeguards the environment; the other expands economic opportunity, but both benefit from each other.

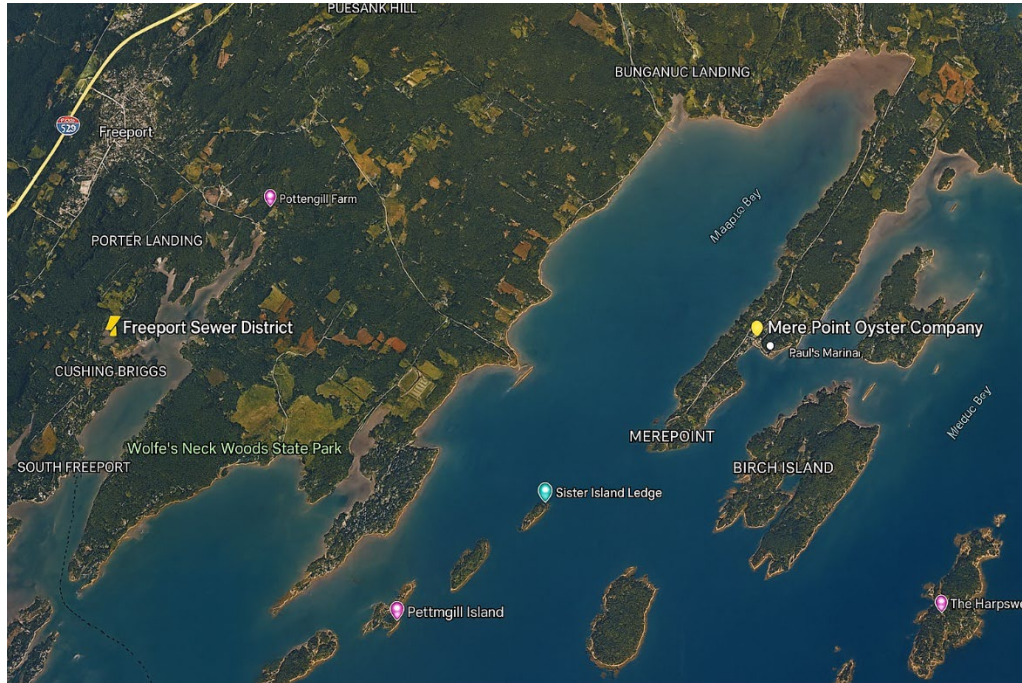
Clean water means stronger oyster crops. A healthy oyster industry provides jobs, local food, and environmental benefits. Together, they form a cycle of resilience that highlights the power of coordinated rural investment.

A Watershed Approach to Rural Development

These projects show how Rural Development's programs—whether focused on infrastructure, business growth, or agricultural opportunity—work best when viewed as pieces of a larger system. Maine's coastal waters connect communities, industries, and ecosystems. Supporting one part of that system strengthens the whole.

With modern wastewater infrastructure in Freeport and a thriving, environmentally beneficial oyster farm in Brunswick, Rural Development investments are helping ensure that Casco Bay remains clean, vibrant, and productive for generations to come.

Proposed Images for Success Story:



Only 4.36 miles separate Freeport's upgraded wastewater system and Mere Point Oyster Company. These two projects demonstrate USDA Rural Development's impact across neighboring communities.



State Director John Butera highlights USDA Rural Development's investment in Freeport's upgraded wastewater system, reducing sanitary concerns and boosting economic development.



Mere Point Oyster Company strengthens Maine's working waterfront with support from USDA Rural Development.



Group Photo caption (L to R): Rob Pease, Farmer, Mere Point Oyster Company; Cameron Niven, Operations Manager, Mere point Oyster Company; John Butera, State Director, USDA Rural Development; Doug Niven, Owner, Mere Point Oyster Company