



Speakers.

Keynote: Heather Johnson

Keynote Session: *The Importance of Sustainable Rural Revitalization*

When: Sept. 4th, 9:30-10:30 AM



Heather Johnson is the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, which works with statewide and local partners, private industry, and small businesses to enhance and sustain economic prosperity in Maine. Heather resides in her hometown of Skowhegan and graduated from the University of Maine. Her career spans the private and public sectors and has included roles in global telecommunications, rural economic development, and broadband expansion in Maine.

Panelists

Speaker: Shay Bellas

Session: *Innovation and Technological Developments to Drive Economic Revitalization*

When: Sept. 4th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Shay Bellas co-founded NaviTour, a platform revolutionizing rural tourism through technology. Her leadership in connecting travelers with unique experiences has fueled economic growth in underserved areas. With a background in law and entrepreneurship, Shay has secured funding and forged partnerships to expand NaviTour’s impact, making her a key advocate for tech-driven economic development.

Panelist: Jack Lesko

Session: Innovation and Technological Developments to Drive Economic Revitalization

When: Sept. 4th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Dr. John “Jack” Lesko is a leading engineering researcher at the Roux Institute and Emeritus Faculty at Virginia Tech. With over 30 years of experience in polymer physics and interdisciplinary material system design, Jack has developed new materials and technologies with significant economic impact. As a co-founder of PowerHub Systems and a National Instructor for the Lean Startup approach, his expertise in innovation and technology is pivotal for driving economic revitalization.

Panelist: Sarah Delmar

Session: *Innovation and Technological Developments to Drive Economic Revitalization*

When: Sept. 4th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Sarah Delmar is the Vice President of Global Expansion and Corporate Development at Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC), which operates innovation campuses worldwide. Since joining CIC in 2012, she has built and led the team responsible for expanding CIC's presence into new markets across North America, Europe, and Asia, focusing on programmatic and physical innovation infrastructure. Sarah also plays a key role in CIC's development of shared lab spaces for tech and life



sciences startups. Originally from Orland, Maine, Sarah recently moved back to the state with her family.

Panelist: Aaron Weiskittel

Session: *Innovation and Technological Developments to Drive Economic Revitalization*

When: Sept. 4th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Aaron R. Weiskittel is a professor of forest biometrics and modeling at the University of Maine, where he is also the Irving Chair of Forest Ecosystem Management. He directs the Center for Research on Sustainable Forests and the Center for Advanced Forestry Systems. Since joining UMaine in 2008, he has secured nearly \$32 million in research grants and published around 165 peer-reviewed papers. Aaron teaches courses in forest measurements and biometrics and is a leading expert in forest growth and yield modeling. He has strong ties to the North American forest sector and is an associate editor for *Frontiers in Forests and Global Change*.

Panelist: John Godfrey



Session: *Wood Fiber Exploitation in a Changing Environment (Climate & Economy)*

When: Sept. 4th, 1:30-3:00 PM



John Godfrey has been a pioneer in the forest products industry since 1974. He independently developed the first OSB mill in Europe and has spearheaded several successful OSB projects across the U.S., Canada, and Europe. John co-founded ForesTech Energy LLC, advancing wood pellet production, and later, FTE Solar, focusing on solar power facilities in Massachusetts. Recently, he began developing a new OSB mill at the former pulp/paper mill site in Jay, Maine. John is a Harvard graduate who is also an experienced pilot in various professional and community organizations. He resides in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

Panelist: Steve Rice

Session: *Wood Fiber Exploitation in a Changing Environment (Climate & Economy)*

When: Sept. 4th, 1:30-3:00 PM



Stephen D. Rice, SVP of Engineering at Highland Carbon Solutions, LLC, excels in sustainable carbon plant design. He leads Global Process Group, LLC as President/CEO, providing innovative biomass product systems. With prior roles as COO at M-E-C Company and President/CEO at Kilntek, Inc., Stephen brings extensive industrial drying and combustion systems expertise. He holds an MS and BS in Wood Science & Technology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Stephen has lectured at top universities, including Pennsylvania State and Oregon State.

Panelist: Shane O'Neil

Session: *Wood Fiber Exploitation in a Changing Environment (Climate & Economy)*

When: Sept. 4th, 1:30-3:00 PM



Shane O’Neill is the Forest Industry Business Development Manager at the University of Maine in Orono. He collaborates with state agencies, non-profits, and university resources to support forest-based businesses and communities, driving innovation and diversification in Maine’s forest economy. Shane is involved in multi-stakeholder collaborations across the region, including FOR/Maine and the NSF Engines regional forest economy innovation accelerator. With degrees in Wood Science from Michigan Technological University and the University of Maine, Shane brings 18 years of experience in academic R&D, business roles, and consulting within the forest-based industries.

Panelist: Eric Kingsley

Session: *Wood Fiber Exploitation in a Changing Environment (Climate & Economy)*

When: Sept. 4th, 1:30-3:00 PM



Eric Kingsley is Vice President of Innovative Natural Resource Solutions LLC (INRS). He has extensive experience as Executive Director for a 1,500-member forestry trade association and supported state and federal agencies with disaster relief funding. Known for his expertise in renewable energy and forest products manufacturing, Eric has also provided testimony on forestry issues to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. At INRS, he leads projects on biomass energy and forest product development. He has been instrumental in initiatives such as the Maine Future Forest Economy Project and the largest new biomass plant in the U.S.

Speaker: Des Fitzgerald

Session: *Sustainable Food Production, An Aquaculture/Agriculture Symbiosis*

When: Sept. 5th, 9:00-10:30 AM



Des FitzGerald is a seasoned leader with extensive experience in business development and entrepreneurial ventures. A Harvard graduate with a background in fisheries and deep-water wind technology, Des founded Ducktrap River Fish Farm and later led ContiSea, overseeing significant growth and innovation. His diverse career includes roles as a management consultant, adjunct professor, and Entrepreneur in Residence at the Maine Venture Fund. Now an Advanced Leadership Initiative Fellow at Harvard, Des brings a wealth of knowledge in leadership and strategic thinking. His dedication extends to numerous volunteer boards, reflecting his commitment to community and environmental sustainability.

Panelist: Devon Robinson

Session: *Sustainable Food Production, An Aquaculture/Agriculture Symbiosis*

When: Sept. 5th, 9:00-10:30 AM



Devon Robinson is a seasoned CEA consultant specializing in greenhouse operations and packaging automation. His blend of technical expertise and project management skills drives innovation in sustainable food production. Devon’s comprehensive understanding of agricultural practices and technological solutions is key to advancing symbiotic food systems.

Panelist: Dean Guest

Session: *Sustainable Food Production, An Aquaculture/Agriculture Symbiosis*

When: Sept. 5th, 9:00-10:30 AM



Dean Guest is the Head of RAS Technology & Design at Great



Northern Salmon, bringing over 35 years of experience in the aquaculture industry. He has played pivotal roles in both Marine Harvest Canada Inc. and MOWI Canada, where he managed freshwater production and breeding programs. Dean's expertise spans the full spectrum of salmon farming, from smolt production to saltwater transfer, with a strong focus on Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS). Resident in New Brunswick, he now leads the technology and design efforts at Katahdin Salmon, leveraging his extensive experience to ensure the success of their land-based Atlantic salmon facility in Millinocket, Maine.

Panelist: Frank Simon

Session: *Sustainable Food Production, An Aquaculture/Agriculture Symbiosis*

When: Sept. 5th, 9:00-10:30 AM



Frank Simon's 50-year career in aquaculture began in 1977 when he co-founded Great Eastern Mussel Farms in Maine. After serving as VP of Maine's first salmon farming operation, Ocean Products Inc., he launched Rain Forest Aquaculture, farming tilapia in Costa Rica,



Ecuador, and Africa. Frank also spearheaded a successful shellfish rollup in Canada and the USA, recently sold to a Canadian pension fund. He is currently involved in barramundi farming in Vietnam, eel and scallop farming in Maine, and the stone crab fishery in The Bahamas. A Cincinnati native, Frank developed his love for Maine waters while teaching at Hurricane Island Outward Bound during college summers.

Speaker: Amanda Rector

Session: *Social Factors in Rural Development*

When: Sept. 5th, 11:00-12:30 PM

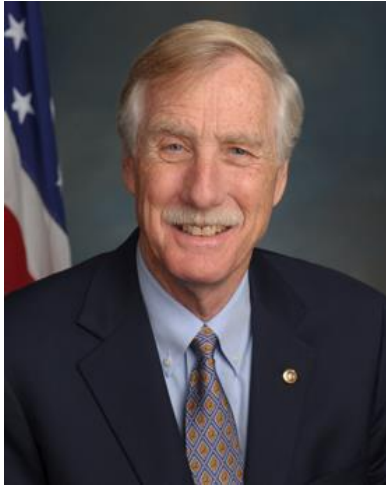


Amanda Rector, Maine’s State Economist, provides critical analysis of economic and demographic trends impacting rural areas. Her insights inform policy decisions and support community development. With a background in economics and public policy, Amanda’s work is vital for understanding and addressing rural development challenges.

Panelist: Angus King

Session: *Social Factors in Rural Development*

When: Sept. 5th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Senator Angus King has had a distinguished career in public service, including serving as Maine's Governor and currently as a U.S. Senator. Known for his pragmatic and bipartisan approach, King has tackled a range of issues from environmental conservation to economic development. His tenure as Governor saw significant advancements in Maine's infrastructure and environmental protection, while in the Senate, he continues to address national challenges with a focus on collaboration and effective policy-making. Senator King's extensive experience in governance and commitment to thoughtful, balanced solutions highlight his role as a leading voice in public service.

Panelist: Rob Riley

Session: *Social Factors in Rural Development*

When: Sept. 5th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Rob Riley has led the Center for Rural Innovation and Investment to drive community development in the Northern Forest region. His efforts in launching impact-investment funds and developing innovative programs have significantly contributed to rural economic growth. Rob's leadership and experience are essential for advancing rural development initiatives.

Panelist: Matt Polstein

Session: *Social Factors in Rural Development*

When: Sept. 5th, 11:00-12:30 PM





Matt Polstein owns and operates the New England Outdoor Center, established in 1982. Focused initially on whitewater rafting, it has grown into a year-round outdoor adventure resort featuring a wedding and events center, lakeside lodging, a restaurant and brewery, and guided activities like snowmobiling, Nordic skiing, and Katahdin ascents. A Portland native, Matt developed his passion for the outdoors at Camp Winona through canoeing and hiking trips. As a Registered Maine Guide and project leader for Ktaadn Resorts, Matt is committed to promoting responsible resource use and cultural tourism, enriching rural communities.

Panelist: Bob Peterson

Session: *Social Factors in Rural Development*

When: Sept. 5th, 11:00-12:30 PM



Dr. Peterson is the Chief Executive Officer at Millinocket Regional Hospital. He has extensive management experience, including roles as Vice President of Operations at Windham Hospital in Connecticut and Administrator for Surgery and Women's and Children's Services at Eastern Maine Medical Center. Dr. Peterson holds a Bachelor of Science from Lenoir-Rhyne College, an MBA from the University of



Connecticut, and a Doctorate from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. He is Board Certified in Healthcare Management and serves on the Maine Hospital Association Board of Directors.