

INNOVATION IN HAWAII'S AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY

ABOUT OCEAN ERA, INC. Ocean Era is located at the Hawaii Ocean Science and Technology Park (HOST Park) which is administered by the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority (NELHA), in Kailua-Kona, and focused on developing sustainable nenu and uku fish farming operations, sea grape culture and other limu (seaweed) farming in addition to continued kampachi research.

THE CHALLENGE. Ocean Era is diligently working to move commercial fish farming from carnivorous fish species, which makes production scaling more environmentally impactful and expensive, to herbivorous fish that feed on seaweed. This allows for greater scalability and is better for the environment. This research is done through their broodstock, hatchery, and most recently a proposed offshore farm operation for native food fish (nenu, kanpachi and moi) along with sea grapes and other limu. The offshore farm will serve as a commercially viable model for environmentally and socially responsible aquaculture, promoting nutrient cycling and minimizing impacts on water quality.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. SBIR award funding has allowed Ocean Era to explore novel research avenues. However, with Phase I funding, often there is additional research that needs to be pursued, outside of the original grant work plan. This additional research—supported by state funding and programs—is critical to successful Phase II submittal and eventual commercialization. Ocean Era has won two Phase I SBIR grants and two Phase II awards for their R&D efforts into sustainable commercial aquaculture operations. With each Phase I grant, the team has also participated in the Hawaii Small Business Innovation Research (HSBIR) Program. HSBIR assists with state matching grants and wrap around services like market research to help companies further the development of new products. The State of Hawaii provides up to 50% match for companies receiving SBIR awards. Over the past four years, Ocean Era has worked with Innovate Hawaii, part of the MEP National Network™, and been awarded approximately \$300,000 in state matching grants to help push the team onto Phase II success and commercialization. The HSBIR program has allowed the company to be more competitive and prepared as they move towards Phase II and commercialization.

Neil Sims, Founder and CEO, has also participated in Innovate Hawaii's SBIR webinars and tutorials to stay on top of the evolving SBIR landscape. This information has proven invaluable in helping the team compete and win SBIR awards.

"The HTDC Innovate Hawaii team has been extremely helpful and is a big part of the reason Ocean Era has been able to push innovation forward in the aquaculture industry. Between the HSBIR program, the state matching grants and SBIR education opportunities, they are a wonderful resource for businesses. They really are focused on building an innovation mindset locally, which leads to incredible opportunities for companies like ours."

-Neil Anthony Sims, Founder & CEO

RESULTS



Headcount has increased to **12** employees, with 8 of these graduates from University of Hawaii Hilo.



\$300,000 in State SBIR matching funds over the past 4 years.



Matching grants allowed the team to revamp their hatchery and build additional broodstock tanks.



Matching grant funding has allowed the team to remain flexible & keep employees together long-term.

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