

Oyster aquaculture on upswing in Virginia

by Janet Krenn

(July 28, 2011) Virginia's oyster aquaculture industry is poised to begin its biggest growth spurt ever, according to a report from Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Virginia Sea Grant. In 2010, oyster growers sold over 16 million oysters worth more than \$5 million. Growers surveyed expect to sell nearly twice as many oysters in 2011. Following years could increase further, as growers planted three times more oyster seed in 2010 than ever before.

The expansion of the oyster industry in Virginia is mainly attributed to the increase of more intensive aquaculture practices that protect the grower's investment. For example, using oyster seed developed in the hatchery at VIMS has reduced the impact of disease while improving meat quality. At the same time, growers have been taking measures to reduce predation on oysters by growing oysters in protective cages and floats.

"Basically, these practices make it possible for growers to plant more oysters upfront and then have more oysters alive to harvest the next year, when the animals mature," says Karen Hudson, Shellfish Aquaculture Specialist at VIMS and co-author of the report.

Whereas oysters continue to increase, hard clam sales and plantings have remained somewhat consistent, according to the report. Despite this, Virginia ranks number one in the country in clam production, with growers planting upwards of 370 million clams annually.

The "Virginia Shellfish Aquaculture Situation and Outlook Report" has been produced annually by Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Virginia Sea Grant since 2005. Results of this survey and other aquaculture topics will be further discussed during the 2011 Virginia Aquaculture Conference, Virginia's biannual meeting for finfish and shellfish aquaculturists, in Williamsburg November 18 and 19.

Find the "Virginia Shellfish Aquaculture Situation and Outlook Report" online.



Oyster Shells: Young oysters prefer to settle on oyster shells like these. Photo by Carly Rose/VASG.

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