From the Mouth of the Bay
Walk on the Hill Wrap-Up

It's not really news to say that Washington, D.C., is paralyzed by partisan bickering. And in this contentious election-year climate, little of substance is expected to pass. Nonetheless, we had a very successful trip to DC this year and I wanted to bring you all up to speed.

We met with a record number of legislators and educated them about our issues. We signed up several members to the Congressional Shellfish Caucus and persuaded a few to co-sponsor Rep. Courtney’s bill (HR.1176 The Shellfish Fairness Marketing Assistance Act), which would restore shellfish as specialty crops under the Farm Bill. We reached an agreement with FDA that hopefully will lead to a thaw in the trade blockade between the U.S. and the EU. Working with our allies from the Gulf and Pacific Coasts we have shown we can be effective communicators.

For the past two months I have been consumed with the follow-up effort to encourage the congressional staffers to follow through on what we discussed. In several offices we were met with requests for information

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Where Do My Dues Dollars Go?

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

When we decided to reactivate the Booster Club this year in order to patch a projected hole in our budget, I felt uneasy doing this for the second time in as many years. While several of you have stepped up to support us, many balked and complained loudly: Why can’t the ECSGA formulate a budget and stick to it? Our members deserve to know where their dues dollars are going.

Every year I formulate a projected budget. This is not an exact science, but we have six years of data and I try to be realistic. At the end of last year it looked as if we were going to fall well short of projections, but a year-end flurry of membership renewals closed the entire budget gap. Thanks to an additional $6,000 in booster club donations we ended 2011 with a balance of $30,787, enough to cover the bulk of our 2012 operating budget – an increase of $8,184 over 2010.

Around 39 percent of our $40,000 annual budget comes from dues collected from our 77 grower-members. Our ten equipment-supplier members and nine shellfish-dealer members contribute 12 percent, and the 72 associate members contribute seven percent.

Roughly 12 percent of our annual budget is covered by income from our festival work (I count member donations of shellfish as dues). The remaining 17 percent of income is from newsletter ads and donors. In most years we typically receive a few thousand dollars in grant funds, but these monies are restricted to reimbursements for printing and travel.

Each year we spend about $40,000, running a pretty tight ship with few places to trim. About 41 percent of every dues dollar goes to pay my part-time executive director’s $15,000 annual salary. This is a bargain considering the hours I put into the job.

I field inquiries from the press; review hundreds of pages of regulations, research proposals, and scientific publications; and write dozens of letters, policy papers and position statements each year. I also organize the board meetings, moderate the LISTSERV and keep the newsletter coming. About seven percent of your dues goes to reimburse my non-lobbying travel expenses. I spent 53 days on the road in 2011 representing the association at the ISSC and at dozens of other meetings, giving presentations on marketing, Vibrios and ecosystem services, to name a few; but I charged the ECSGA for only about half my travel.

We budget $8,000 (22 cents of each dues dollar) for two congressional receptions held each year. The ECSGA chips in $5,000 to pay for several events the week of our Walk on the Hill. This is a small fraction of the $50,000 in expenses that are shared among the PCSGA, GOIC and several corporate sponsors. We believe this is a good investment in our congressional relationships.

Around 12 percent of your 2011 dues reimbursed lobbying travel for folks “Walking the Hill.” However, we rewrote the travel reimbursement policy last year to trim this expense so volunteers will now have to pay their own way. This year we attended 31 meetings with legislators, five agency meetings and four receptions. It was an ambitious schedule and we expect to see some tangible results.

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Product Spotlight

Shellfish Labels
Allen-Bailey Tag & Label, Inc.

Allen-Bailey Tag & Label, Inc. is introducing the newest in shellfish labeling. These innovative labels are ideal for shellfish wholesalers, working as both a branding tool and a record-keeping system. They are designed to withstand damp environments and permanently adhere to three very demanding surfaces: waxed cartons, plastic bins, and Styrofoam® containers.

The label measures 4" wide x 9" long with a facesplit across the 4" dimension dividing it in two. Labels are made of a 3-mil synthetic, and measure 4-mil thick because of the 1-mil of permanent adhesive. Its 90-lb. special liner, perfed for easy removal, is designed to resist curling in very moist environments. The label is thermal-transfer imprinted and dispenses from a roll, making one label with two identical parts with different functions.

One half of the label is removed from the liner and applied to the container surface remaining with the shipment to the customer. Branding information, such as name and logo of the wholesaler, as well as container contents are identified on this portion of the label. The other half stays on the liner and is kept as a record of what was provided in the shipment, accompanying all other paperwork associated with that order.

The information on the label is used to identify and brand the product for every order being processed. Since labels are printed on site, the information can vary from label to label, displaying what you choose.

For more information on these labels and other shellfish tags, as well as diamond deadlocks and traceability software, contact Ron Marley at (877) 853-0598, rmarley@abtl.com or visit us at www.abtl.com.

Where Do My Dues Go?

In an average year we pay $1,000 in NFI annual dues, $1,005 in insurance, $690 for tax preparation. We have some administrative, website, supply and postage expenses that eat up less than 15 percent of the budget. We also depend heavily on volunteers, most notably Gef Flimlin’s secretary, Kelly Jurgensen, who keeps the books, pays the bills and does most of the mailings.

So what are we doing to ensure we don’t run in the red again? We will continue to formulate projected annual budgets based on our past experiences. We have formed a Finance Subcommittee to review expenses, look for places to trim and to examine potential new revenue sources. The subcommittee has also proposed policy changes that should decrease expenses.

We need to be more aggressive in recruiting new members. For this we need your help. Last year we gained about 40 new grower members, yet only about eight percent of the industry is stepping up to join. A few dozen more grower memberships would solve all our fiscal concerns and enable us to do so much more. We also need to do a better job retaining our existing members. Over the last two years 25 growers and two grower’s associations failed to renew their memberships.

We will continue to keep our costs as low as possible and to seek additional corporate sponsors and grant funding. We are also re-evaluating the cost-benefit ratio of our participation in seafood festivals.

As always, we welcome your ideas and your participation. Thanks for your support and once again, special thanks to the Booster Club.
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Tom Ahern got his start working in the food industry with Grayledge Farms in Glastonbury, Conn. Grayledge was established by the legendary Henry Saglio, known as the “Father of the Poultry Industry” and credited with giving the world a cheaper and meatier chicken. At Grayledge Tom ran the husbandry operation and oversaw the marketing of numerous products, including turkey and game birds.

In 1995 he made the transition to the seafood industry, traveling all over the country developing new markets for shellfish in his work with American Mussel Harvesters in Narragansett, R.I. In 2002 Tom began working for JP’s Shellfish, out of Elliot, Maine, a wholesale shellfish producer and distributor with markets across the U.S.

Explaining his approach from the JP’s office he set up in Rhode Island, Tom said, “We continue to advocate for the small shellfish producer, marketing artisan products with a strong connection to their home waters.

“We’re always on the lookout for new oyster beds even as we continue to develop ways to educate consumers on the value and safety of shellfish,” he added.

Tom’s approach to shellfish marketing meshes well with the ECSGA’s philosophy: Only by working together can the industry continue to provide consumers with safe, fresh, wholesome shellfish, while at the same time improving the environment through sustainable shellfish culture.

Tom concluded, “We strongly believe that the ECSGA is an important and effective advocate for commercial shellfish farmers and harvesters along the entire East Coast.”
The Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) is rolling out new, nationwide regulations designed to control the proliferation of *Vibrio* bacteria in shellfish.

To say the process has been fast-tracked is an understatement – normally changes of this magnitude would take years to implement. These new regulations were only developed early this year, went out for comment in February, and were adopted by the ISSC board at its meeting on March 7. Thirty days after the FDA concurs, these changes will become law, and will be implemented in many states this spring.

Although *Vibrio* bacteria are naturally occurring pathogens not associated with pollution or sewage, they can become a problem when water temperatures reach around 80°F. The new regulations are aimed at making sure shellfish are cooled down as quickly as possible to stop bacterial growth between harvest and consumption. Harvesters will need to keep trip records, while dealers will need to adopt several new Critical Control Points in their HACCP plans.

If industry can make these changes, the models predict that we should see a drop in illnesses. Even though every state will be imposing new harvest and dealer regulations, the severity of the new restrictions will be proportionate to the risk in each state.

So if your state has experienced *Vibrio* illnesses or has warm summer-time water temperatures, your rules may be stricter than those in cold-water states. Virginia oyster growers began implementing many of these controls in 2010 for the few months of the year when *Vibrios* are a concern.

The additional paperwork burden on shellfish dealers will be substantial. To ensure they meet the new Critical Control Points, dealers will need to maintain a raft of new records. Since much of the new regulatory language is slightly vague, we expect the ISSC to issue some guidance on interpreting things like how to measure the internal temperature of a live oyster. We also expect that each state is going to interpret these requirements according to their level of risk and their industry needs.

With so many substantial changes in the works, every harvester and dealer will need to keep a close eye on developments this spring.

For more information on *Vibrio*, visit [http://ecsga.org/Pages/Issues/Human_Health/vibrioPortal.htm](http://ecsga.org/Pages/Issues/Human_Health/vibrioPortal.htm).
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about how many jobs we create and how much economic activity we generate. So if I ask you to provide your representative with answers to these questions for your state, please help me out.

We need to stay active to protect our clean-water initiatives from powerful Farm Bureau opposition, and to continue explaining that shellfish can play a significant role in nutrient remediation solutions. We can be reasonably certain that most of the programs we count on for critical research will be facing drastic cuts, so the watch-word in DC is doing more with less.

When you see the folks who made the 2012 Walk on the Hill so successful, please say thanks for representing your industry. This trip is both expensive and time-consuming.

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**Upcoming Events in 2012**

- **National Shellfisheries Association**, March 25-29, Seattle, WA. Contact Sandra.shumway@uconn.edu or visit [www.shellfish.org](http://www.shellfish.org).
- **Techniques in Shellfish Aquaculture**, May 21-25, Walpole, ME. Contact Dana Morse, (207) 563-3146 or visit [server.dmc.maine.edu/courses.html](http://server.dmc.maine.edu/courses.html).

Links and more information available on the Events page at [www.ECSGA.org](http://www.ECSGA.org).
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