From the Mouth of the Bay

**Post-Harvest-Processing Mandate Would Likely Be an Industry Disaster**

For several years I have been saying that mandatory Post Harvest Processing (PHP) would be the end of shellfish farming in the U.S. as we know it. Here’s why.

In 2009 the FDA unveiled a new regulation that would have forced all oysters harvested from the Gulf of Mexico from April through November to undergo sterilization via Post Harvest Processing. There are currently only four approved PHP methods: cool pasteurization (the patented Ameripure process), ultra high pressure (HP), extreme freezing and low dose gamma irradiation. Each of these requires expensive machinery and adds substantial cost, and each results in dead product.

The move was an effort to control illnesses caused by *Vibrio vulnificus* bacteria that sicken about 70 people each year. *V. vulnificus* occurs naturally and proliferates rapidly in warm, brackish waters. It can cause illness in immunocompromised individuals (those who suffer from liver disease or diabetes, or who take certain drugs). Half of all *V.* illnesses are caused by wound infections, and the other half are associated with shellfish consumption. Of this latter group about half of the infections are fatal, resulting in about a dozen deaths each year.

Through congressional pressure we managed to get the FDA to back off from the PHP mandate (at least for now), but it is clear that many in the FDA still believe this is the way to go. Back in 2009 I believed a PHP mandate would be disastrous for our industry, and now, four years later, I am more convinced than ever.

For years I have seen cheap Asian clams being displayed at the Boston Seafood Show, but this year I stopped in at the Vietnamese Pavilion and asked for a price quote. For as little as five to seven cents apiece (delivered!) you can buy cooked, frozen, vacuum-packed Asian white clams. You can get Asian oysters for about 15 cents. One can only speculate about the water quality of their growing areas, but if they have been properly cooked then you don’t really have to worry about bacterial or viral pathogens. Just the yuck factor.

My greatest fear is if we are forced to put our shellfish through PHP processes we would be in direct competition with Asian producers who are selling dead meat on a shell for a fraction of what it costs us to grow them. I thank my congressional allies for standing up for our right to sell live, fresh shellfish.

A few months ago I was enjoying some sushi at my favorite local Asian restaurant in the heart of New England clamyort. My wife ordered some miso soup, and there in the bowl were these Asian white clams! I complained to the owner, but got nowhere. We had to find a new sushi spot. If he was going to buy Asian clams when fresh, wholesome clams can be bought locally every day of the year for just a few cents more, then what other corners was he cutting?

The experience hammered home one simple fact: We need to market fresh, local seafood and let our suppliers know we won’t stand for anything less! **And we need to keep fighting to preserve the right to sell fresh, wholesome, live shellfish.** We need to keep working on improving our handling practices as we continue to drive down illness rates so we can convince the FDA that our product is safe for raw consumption.

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**Milford Oyster Festival August 16-17**

Preparations are well under way for the ECSGA’s participation in the 39th annual Milford (Conn.) Oyster Festival, slated for Aug. 16-17, 2013. Once again, ECSGA will be a major presence at the festival, serving raw and cooked shellfish at two locations on Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm, and in what has become a tradition in recent years, providing a raw bar and chowder at the pre-festival “Oyster Eve” Friday from 6 to 9:30 pm. Admission to the festival, which is held rain or shine, is free, and some 50,000 participants are expected.

Because our participation is instrumental in funding our annual operating budget, we rely on our members and other volunteer supporters to make it happen. Please consider helping out. It’s a great way to show your support for an organization that does so much for our industry, to meet others.

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**Continued on page 5**

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**ECSGA Newsletter   **

**Page 1**
Legislative Updates

Specialty Crop Status, EU Trade Embargo, Ocean Acidification

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

For several years we have been working to get shellfish restored to the list of specialty crops under the Farm Bill in order to be eligible for modest block grants for research and marketing. This is a simple one-line bill that doesn’t ask for any new funding, it simply makes us eligible for support enjoyed by other small, non-commodity producers.


We still have hope that the stand-alone bill, HR 1590 (and its companion in the Senate, S.754 – Shellfish Marketing Assistance Fairness Act, sponsored by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)) can get some traction. The education process is well underway and we are nearing passage. If you have not yet contacted your representative on this, now is a good time.

Following is a list of specialty crop talking points that you can use when talking to your congressional representatives:

- HR 1590 – Shellfish Marketing Assistance Fairness Act would re-establish farmed shellfish as specialty crops.
- U.S. farmed shellfish production continues to grow in most coastal communities, providing sustainable seafood in rural communities. Cultured shellfish is the largest component of marine aquaculture in the U.S., with annual harvests worth roughly $300 million.
- The shellfish farming community is dominated by thousands of small-scale producers who are ill-equipped to carry out significant marketing and research efforts on their own.
- Current marketing assistance programs under the USDA and DOC are not available to shellfish producers.
- Farmed shellfish were eligible for key specialty crop marketing and research assistance until passage of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004, (HR 3242, § 3).
- Specialty crops currently include: fruits (grapes and wine), tree nuts, culinary herbs and spices, vegetables and medicinal plants, as well as nursery, floriculture and horticulture crops.

EU Trade Embargo

For the past three years U.S. shellfish growers have been forbidden to ship shellfish products into the European Union. When our FDA pointed to deficiencies in the European shellfish sanitation protocols and said that EU members couldn’t export shellfish into the U.S., their European counterparts retaliated by raising trumped-up concerns about deficient algal-toxin monitoring, and barred U.S. exports from entering the EU.

This issue is frustrating and difficult to address because it involves motivating two agencies over exports from the EU.

Please thank the co-sponsors of HR 1590 Shellfish Marketing Assistance Fairness Act.

Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn., 3rd)
John Larson (D-Conn., 1st)
Chellie Pingree (D-Maine, 1st)
“Ed” Markey (D-Mass., 5th; now Sen.)
Kurt Schrader (D-Ore., 5th)
Steve Israel (D-N.Y., 3rd)
Richard Hanna (R-N.Y. 22nd)
Rob Wittman (R-Va., 1st)
Jared Huffman (D-Calif., 2nd)

Ocean Acidification

We continue to push for expanded funding for research on ocean acidification. This is not a climate-change issue, just simple chemistry. When we add a few giga tons of CO2 to the atmosphere, one-third goes right into the oceans, where it depresses the pH (increases seawater’s acidity) and makes waters corrosive to calcium carbonate, dissolving shellfish shells.

Impacts are already being felt on the West Coast, with models projecting similar problems on the East Coast in a few short decades. We need to start developing mitigation and adaptation strategies so we can keep our businesses going.

We will be giving a briefing to staffers of the Congressional Shellfish Caucus and the Senate Oceans Caucus on September 10-11, 2013 on this issue, in addition to bringing them up to speed on our other priorities.

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Memorial Fund to Honor Legacy of Mike Voisin

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

This past February, just as shellfish industry leaders from all three coasts were gathering in Washington, D.C., for our annual Walk on the Hill, we learned that Mike Voisin, our leader and mentor, had suffered a fatal heart attack. Mike taught me and countless others how to be effective advocates for our cause. He was patient, knowledgeable and extremely effective.

In an effort to ensure that Mike’s many contributions to the shellfish world are not forgotten, the shellfish associations from all three coasts have established a scholarship fund to help growers travel to Washington to learn how to become effective communicators and to help us in the important task of defending our industry from unworkable regulations.

I hope you will join us in making a donation to The Mike Voisin Memorial Fund so that young farmers will have a chance to learn how we work to influence policy and guide our lawmakers towards workable solutions to our many challenging problems. These trips are expensive, and if you have not joined us in our past Walk on the Hill adventures you may not realize the importance of what we do there. All the more reason to make a donation to ensure that your voice continues to be heard in Washington.

One-hundred percent of the donated funds will be used for growers to travel to Washington, D.C. Award recipients will be selected annually from among the membership rolls of the ECSGA, the Gulf Oyster Industry Council and Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association. We would like to see this fund fully endowed with $50,000 so that we can continue this program indefinitely.

The Mike Voisin Memorial Fund welcomes donations from anyone who would like to honor Mike’s memory and ensure that future generations carry on his tradition. Up to 85 percent of your donation is tax-deductible (the ECSGA is a non-profit 501c-6 trade association).

To make a donation with a credit card via Paypal please visit www.ECSGA.org and click on the Donate button on our home page. We also welcome checks made payable to ECSGA and mailed to 1623 Whitesville Rd., Toms River, NJ 08755. (Please note “Voisin Fund” in the memo line).

If you have questions about the administration of the The Mike Voisin Memorial Fund please contact ECSGA Executive Director Bob Rheault, (401) 783-3360 or bob@ECSGA.org.

From the President
Interns a Good Deal

Last week our farm hosted an extern from the VIMS Oyster Aquaculture Training Program (OAT), a six-month mix of lectures, lab and field work, field trips — and an opportunity to work with one or several commercial operations.

If it sounds like an internship, that’s really what it is. This is the third year we have had an OAT extern. It’s a good deal for us (free labor; interesting, intelligent, well-trained people). It’s a good deal for them, too. While working side-by-side with us, they experience how we do what we do, not only when things go well, but also in the face of challenging field, management, labor, mechanical, marketing and other conditions.

We have also arranged our own internships for a few days, including friends who come away with a new appreciation of what we do, along with a good haul of oysters.

I suspect many of us would have benefitted from such an opportunity when we started out, especially in retrospect. Who knows how much time and money we might have saved, and how many fewer oysters we might have killed off? Perhaps the ECSGA can facilitate an informal linking of interested interns and host oyster farms. Maybe we can get an intern to help set up the program…

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From the President
Interns a Good Deal

ECSGA President Dan Grosse

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A VIMS/OAT extern and an intern help employees at Toby Island Oyster Bay Co. in Chincoteague, Va.

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A VIMS/OAT extern and an intern help employees at Toby Island Oyster Bay Co. in Chincoteague, Va.
Member Profile:

Hooper Island Oyster Aquaculture Co.

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

Johnny Shockley and Ricky Fitzhugh grew up on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. Johnny is a third-generation waterman who made a living crabbing, while Ricky bought and sold fish from the watermen of Dorchester County. When tighter regulations and shrinking quotas started to pinch the fishing industry, they decided to take a gamble and see if they couldn’t make a living growing oysters.

For decades Maryland’s lease laws had choked off farming, while just to the south, growers in Virginia had developed a vibrant clam and oyster farming industry worth some $40 million. When Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley proposed rewriting the state laws on oyster leasing to stimulate the oyster farming industry worth a living growing oysters. 2009, the pair seized on the opportunity.

Once the lease laws were fixed and private individuals and corporations were allowed to lease bottom for farming, the door was opened for folks like Ricky and Johnny who were willing to work hard and try something different. They were also committed to revitalizing the bay. Knowing the importance of the wild oyster for water quality, and its role in providing habitat for juvenile fish and crabs, they felt it was important to repopulate the wild beds for the vitality of Chesapeake Bay. They saw aquaculture as a way to re-invigorate wild beds while ensuring a sustainable supply of oysters for consumers.

Over the last three years these two partners have developed a substantial oyster farming operation, as well as a line of equipment for farmers that includes upwellers, tumblers, cages and everything else a grower would need. They have an open-door policy and believe that by sharing their knowledge and experience, their successes and failures, they can help the entire industry grow and prosper.

Their mission is to re-brand the Chesapeake Bay oyster as the premier oyster in the country, believing that as the industry grows we all become stronger together. Johnny says, “Our neighbor’s success is our success, and every grower in the bay is connected. We all share the responsibility of rebuilding the reputation of the Bay oyster.”

Johnny believes that a thriving aquaculture industry will help revitalize the ecology of Chesapeake Bay. Since oysters improve water quality and provide important habitat, having millions of them in the water will help restore ecological balance.

Johnny hopes that by providing seed, equipment and training to the next generation of Maryland waterman-farmers he can make a living while helping the Bay.

Johnny has developed innovative solutions to the unique challenges posed by the Maryland environment. He is committed to marketing an oyster with a consistent flavor, size and shape. He looked at what others were doing and modified the gear and equipment so he can sort, cull and process thousands of oysters on the water with a minimum of back-breaking labor. He has developed new high-efficiency, low-maintenance techniques that many older growers are eyeing with envy.

Johnny welcomes new growers and doesn’t fear the competition that they will bring. He offers farm tours to anyone, believing that as long as the industry maintains high quality standards markets will grow to buy all we can produce.

I asked Johnny why he joined the ECSGA and stepped up to become a board member. He said, “I see the ECSGA as sharing our desire to develop and promote a thriving oyster aquaculture industry. We felt we needed to connect with industry leaders and we saw that the ECSGA had a good understanding of the key issues, such as public education, policy development and market research and promotion, that will allow the industry to thrive for many years to come.”

Johnny has been an active board member, joining us at all our functions in DC and at the Milford Oyster Festival. This year he was recognized by Startup America and was selected as one of the top 20 entrepreneurs in the nation, with an award presented both at the White House and in his home state of Maryland.

For more info on Hooper Island Oyster Aquaculture Company and Chesapeake Gold Oysters, visit www.cgoysters.com.
— Continued from page 1

**Milford Oyster Festival**

growers and to have a great time doing something worthwhile.

In addition to the extensive food court, the festival offers musical entertainment (this year’s headlining band is Blues Traveler!), a classic car hop, a children’s area, schooner rides, police K-9 demonstrations, crafts for sale and many other attractions. So come help out and bring along the whole family to enjoy the festival.

The ECSGA booth is located in the food-court area, and features a wide variety of oysters provided by our members. The festival website promises that, “many of the growers will be at the festival with their oysters, so you can ask them how they do it and why their oysters are the best.” Growers, this is a golden opportunity to educate the public about just how valuable our industry is. We need you there!

Again this year we will host the now-famous oyster-shucking contest, where some of the world’s fastest shuckers help out at the booth for the chance to compete for a cash prize. There will also be an oyster-eating competition in conjunction with our booth, where some of Milford’s famous (and not-so-famous) try to down a dozen oysters in record time.

*If you can help out, please contact Trisha Kozlowski, trisha.gilbert@yahoo.com or Kathy Rhodes, (203) 623-2819 or krhodes23@comcast.net*
ISSC Biennial Meeting Oct. 26 – Nov. 1
Why You Should Attend
by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

The Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) meets every other year to set the regulations under which we operate our businesses. This year the ISSC is meeting in San Antonio, Tex., over the last week in October, and if you make your living in the shellfish world you should be figuring out how you are going to participate. Although there are regional industry representatives on the ISSC Executive Board, and several associations send representatives to the meetings, only a handful of companies send folks to these important gatherings. If you have been struggling to comply with new *Vibrio* regulations and time/temperature requirements then you can see why you need to get engaged with the ISSC.

The ISSC is a slow-moving behemoth comprised of industry members, state regulators and employees of federal agencies. Since 1982 the ISSC has worked to develop a uniform set of rules governing the entire national shellfish industry: *The Guide for the Control of Molluscan Shellfish*. The latest 2011 revision is 478 pages long and covers everything from harvest area designations, inspection and enforcement.

While the system is far from perfect, at least industry has a seat at the table to inform regulators about our needs. By staying engaged we can often prevent the implementation of unworkable regulations with disastrous unintended consequences. If not for the ISSC you can be sure the FDA would have outlawed raw shellfish a long time ago.

Because of the complex nature of our industry, the week-long ISSC biennial meetings are jam-packed with important sessions on a wide range of subjects. For the first three days, proposed changes to the Model Ordinance language are debated by appropriate committees. In 2011 there were 70 proposed wording changes considered by about 50 different committees, subcommittees and workgroups. Each proposal gets debated several times and then gets voted on by the Assembly and the Board. Each year only a few of the proposals end up being passed into regulation, while most get sent back to committee for refinement. I sit on many of these committees, but because many
— Continued on page 7

### Shellfish Found to Contain Performance-Enhancing Substance

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

Athletes are always looking for ways to get an edge over the competition — especially if that edge can be found in legal and natural compounds they can add to their diet. So I was intrigued when I saw the July 5, 2013 issue of *Science Daily* reporting that a natural compound found in beets and shellfish could boost athletic performance.

According to a study supervised by Ithaca College’s Exercise and Sport Sciences Chair Thomas Swensen, betaine – a nutrient found in shellfish and beets – boosts athletic performance by nearly six percent when added to a sports drink. Swenson speculated that, “betain may contribute to creatine synthesis, which improves strength, power and short-term performance.”

The Ithaca College study monitored the performance of college-aged cyclists with and without betaine supplements and found that one week of supplementation with 2.5 grams of betaine yielded a 5.5-percent increase in performance variables such as average power and peak power.

According to a 2004 journal article by Stuart Craig, marine invertebrates are one of the richest sources of betaine, averaging about one percent betaine. I learned that betaine functions as an osmolyte that protects cells, proteins and enzymes from environmental stress such as dehydration or high temperatures.

Craig noted that there is a growing body of evidence that betaine is an important nutrient for the prevention of chronic disease.

Betaine is a zwitterionic quaternary ammonium compound and is a derivative of the amino acid glycine. I have no idea what zwitterionic means, but it would be huge points in Scrabble!

— Photo by theepochtimes.com

College-aged cyclists realized a 5.5-percent increase in performance after just one week of taking betaine supplements in sports drinks.

was curious about how many oysters or clams I would need to eat to get this performance boost, so I did a little research. Web sources tell me that a one-ounce serving of raw shellfish contains 35 mg of betaine, so you only need to eat 68 ounces of shellfish, or roughly 264 small oysters or clams each day to get the above mentioned 5.5 percent performance boost. This would be good for sales, but probably not too practical as a daily diet.

I guess I will just add this to the growing body of evidence showing that shellfish are good for you! We know that shellfish are a Weight Watchers “Power Food,” that they have ten times as much zinc as beef, and are high in protein and very high in the heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. So stay healthy and strong by eating shellfish regularly! 
— Continued from page 6

**ISSC Biennial Meeting**

Meet concurrently there is no way I can be in on every discussion involving important regulations that directly affect our industry. We really need industry members to show up and voice their concerns.

This year the ECSGA has submitted five proposed changes to the Model Ordinance on behalf of our members:

1. Allow small producers to use bulk tagging when harvesting from a single harvest area on a single day, so growers bringing in hundreds of bags would not need hundreds of identical tags.
2. Allow shellfish farmers growing seed in prohibited waters to shorten the time required to separately track those seed when testing reveals that no deleterious substances are present.
3. Stipulate what inspectors of aquaculture facilities should be inspecting.
4. Define when the male-specific coliphage (MSC) assay should (and should not) be used.
5. Clarify tagging requirements for wet-storage operators.

Make plans today to attend the ISSC meeting in San Antonio and protect your business. Consider it an investment in your future. If you cannot attend yourself, then consider pooling your resources with other producers to send someone to the meeting.

For more details on the meeting and the process visit [www.ISSC.org](http://www.ISSC.org).

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**Join Our LISTSERV**

If you haven’t joined the ECSGA e-mail ListServ yet you’re missing out on lots of timely news and information.

It’s free and easy to get started. Just click on the Join ListServ button on our website, [www.ECSGA.org](http://www.ECSGA.org) and follow the directions.

The volume of posts is not overwhelming and the list is our primary conduit for delivering important news, grant information and action alerts to our members.
New ARS Shellfish Geneticist
Dina Proestou Starts Work
It is truly a pleasure to introduce myself as the newly appointed USDA ARS shellfish geneticist, stationed at the University of Rhode Island’s Kingston Campus. The creation of the ARS shellfish genetics program on the East Coast is a direct response to industry’s desire to grow an even hardier, tastier product and to expand the presence of shellfish aquaculture in the nation’s agricultural and economic landscape.

It took quite some time for this new ARS program to become a reality, and a great debt is owed to the many ARS staff, industry representatives, academics at the cutting edge of shellfish research and members of Congress for their dedication and perseverance in getting the job done.

Building on their momentum, I hope to establish positive working relationships with growers, government and academic researchers, and federal and state policy makers alike to help move the shellfish aquaculture agenda forward.

Specifically, I hope to use my knowledge of shellfish biology, ecology, genetics and genomics to implement a research program that prioritizes prominent industry concerns (such as increased disease pressure, climate change and ocean acidification) and complements ongoing projects led by academic, non-profit and government institutions.

For example, a significant obstacle that East Coast shellfish growers must overcome is disease. Not only do multiple diseases result in substantially reduced production, but the threat of disease is highly unpredictable from year to year and location to location, making it difficult to anticipate the extent of both short- and long-term impacts.

Breeding programs geared toward creating disease-resistant oyster lines have been established at various sites along the East Coast to address this issue, but the process is lengthy and expensive. Initially, I plan to conduct research to gain a better understanding of the genetic mechanisms underlying disease resistance, which will surely assist oyster breeders in achieving their goals, while accelerating the availability of disease-resistant seed for growers.

I bring over 15 years of experience in shellfish biology, estuarine ecology and genetics to this position. After completing a BS in Biology at the University of Michigan, I relocated to the Ocean State and developed a love for shellfish while I studied marine biology and ecology and earned a Ph.D. in Biological Sciences from the University of Rhode Island.

Following my graduate work with slipper shells (Crepidula fornicata), I worked as a post-doctoral fellow under Dr. Marta Gómez-Chiarri and investigated mechanisms of disease resistance in the Eastern Oyster (Crassostrea virginica).

Prior to assuming the ARS position, I spent four years as an ecologist at the US EPA’s Atlantic Ecology Division in Narragansett, R.I., probing the ecological effects of chemical pollutants on estuarine biota and identifying the genetic mechanisms of adaptive tolerance to PCBs in killifish (Fundulus heteroclitus) populations inhabiting highly contaminated estuaries.

Serving the USDA ARS and the shellfish community is a tremendous opportunity, and I look forward to re-connecting with some of you and meeting many of you for the first time. Ultimately, I am here to address your needs and concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Dina Proestou
USDA ARS Shellfish Geneticist
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Special thanks to Sen. Jack Reed for his help in securing funding for this new shellfish geneticist position.