I am writing this in an airport on my way back from the PCSGA annual meeting in Washington State. The meeting was truly inspiring. Held in a mountain resort outside Seattle, the two-day conference was attended by 200 members of industry and academia who gathered to review the latest advances and challenges facing industry. They have great support from their industry members and lots of great scientists devoted to helping them resolve their issues.

The first presentation of the conference was deeply disturbing. Dr. Richard Feely from NOAA’s Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory in Seattle presented data on ocean acidification that made my fears about global warming and sea level rise pale in comparison. About 30% of the CO$_2$ we pump into our atmosphere dissolves into our oceans. This drives down the pH. I had been taught, not too long ago, that the pH of the oceans could never change because the buffer system was too immense to budge. It turns out this was wrong. Perhaps my teachers couldn’t predict that mankind would pump 525 billion tons of CO$_2$ into the atmosphere. The pH of the ocean is dropping and the projections for the next 50 to 100 years are chilling. The impacts to our industry and the entire ocean food web will be devastating.

NOAA scientists have measured a drop of ocean pH from 8.21 to 8.10 since the industrial revolution. This may not sound like much, but because the pH is measured on a logarithmic scale this represents a 30% increase in the concentration of acid in seawater. Based on the current rate of CO$_2$ production we can predict a 0.2 pH decline in the next decade. Once the pH declines by 0.4 units shell-forming organisms (such as shellfish and corals) will be fighting the forces of physics to form shell. These facts are not in dispute, even by the skeptics that question the causes of global warming.

The base of the marine food-web is composed largely of shell-forming organisms such as coccolithophores, radiolarians and pteropods. Without them it is unclear what copepods and fish will have left to eat. Dr. Feely predicts that in the next 50 to 100 years we could see a collapse of the marine food chain potentially leading to mass extinctions of marine species. For us in the shellfish culture industry and the two billion dollars of US shellfish landings the implications are pretty clear. Find a new job.

For years I had been able to put Al Gore’s projections of doom in the back of my mind. Suddenly the impacts of a fossil fuel economy are hitting very close to home and the need to change our ways is urgent. The last seven global extinctions were associated with drops in ocean pH. The earth just recovered from the last one 700 million years ago.

The early impacts of this change may already be contributing to hatchery issues that the industry has been experiencing on the Pacific Coast. In addition to devastating larval mortalities related to the bacteria *Vibrio tubaishii*, there is a possibility that acidic, deep-ocean waters, brought to the surface during their summer upwelling event is mixing with coastal waters, perhaps explaining some of their problems with fertilization and larval development. For more on this topic visit http://www.pmel.noaa.gov/co2/OA/background.html

Bob Rheault, Executive Director
Leadership Changes in the ECSGA

Six years ago, the ECSGA was started by a group of growers and extension agents who recognized a need for a unifying industry voice that could bring our diverse regional growers together to tackle the issues holding our industry back. I was elected as President and shortly thereafter we hired Ed Rhodes to be our Executive Director. Over the years Ed and I, along with a handful of other committed volunteers, have worked hard to establish this Association as a political force. Teaming up with allies from the PCSGA, the Gulf Oyster Industry Council and the National Fisheries Institute we have demonstrated that we can be effective tackling diverse issues ranging from Army Corp Permits to Organic Standards and a proposed endangered species listing for oysters. We helped establish the Congressional Shellfish Caucus and have provided comments on dozens of topics impacting our industry. We established the East Coast Shellfish Research Institute and won $760,000 in grants to fund critical shellfish research. Ed and I have been an effective tag-team working to help our industry.

Late last year, Ed accepted a position with Phillips Seafood developing sources of sustainable seafood. Over the past year that work has taken him on dozens of trips abroad. As his responsibilities grew, he found that he had less time than he needed to devote to the ECSGA. This summer, Ed announced he would be stepping down and I was honored when the BOD asked me to serve in his place. It will be a challenge filling Ed’s capable shoes, but since I sold my farm earlier this year, I can now devote all my time and energy to ECSGA affairs.

Replacing me as President is Tom Kehoe of K&B Seafood. Tom has been an active board member since the start and also serves on the board of the NFI. Tom has joined us on every lobbying trip to DC and he is looking forward to making our organization more professional so we can better serve our members.

I hope I can still count on Ed to help us out with key issues in the future and I wish him all the best in his new position. Ed and Kathy established our position as suppliers for the Milford Oyster Festival and we hope that we can maintain that relationship. Kathy will continue to serve as Administrative Assistant, maintaining our website and producing the newsletter. I am especially looking forward to devoting my full energies to the ECSGA. We have come a long way in six years, but I recognize there is much more to do.
From the New President

To the Membership of ECSGA,

We owe Ed Rhodes, our departing Executive Director, a debt of gratitude for his dedication and hard work on our behalf over these past few years. Thank also to Bob Rheault who is not leaving but stepping in to fill Ed’s role as Executive Director. I humbly succeed Bob and will look to him for much wise counsel.

I write to you to ask you to consider the times. We have just completed a Presidential election cycle unlike any in my lifetime. Additionally, the economic news from Wall Street and Main Street also is unlike anything I have seen or heard. The Shellfish Community needs to be heard in the midst of these and many other important events. The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association gives us a voice, a voice as big and loud as you and I want to make it.

I for one do not want to have a voice with the many different Government Regulators without the ECSGA. The ECSGA enables us to be heard effectively. Get involved! Let’s work together to keep advancing the agenda of the Shellfish Growers of the East Coast. Please call or e-mail me at any time.

Regards,
Tom Kehoe
President
East Coast Shellfish Growers Association

Habitat Value of Oyster Culture Gear

by Gulnihar Ozbay, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Delaware State University

The aquaculture industry has grown at a rate of 8.8% per year worldwide since 1970 (FAO 2007). Along with this tremendous growth has come an increasing awareness and concern over the environmental impacts of aquaculture activities. There exist a broad range of techniques for culturing a variety of species with differing impacts on the surrounding land and water. Bivalve aquaculture is considered to be one of the most benign, even beneficial, subsets of the aquaculture industry. Specifically, the culture of oysters is often a passive operation using native species with no human inputs (food, medicines, etc.), and these organisms in culture function in much the same capacities as their wild counterparts (Shumway et al. 2003). Off-bottom techniques are often used in the culture of bivalves and these employ various types of containers to improve growth and survival over on-bottom techniques. For the purposes of our research, off-bottom techniques will be implicit in the mention of bivalve and oyster aquaculture. A sizeable body of research exists concerning the benthic impacts of culture of various bivalve species. While physiological differences exist between these species, the impacts of individual bivalve culture operations are often compared even when different species are being grown.

The eastern oyster (Crassostrea virginica) is a vital species in the estuaries of the mid-Atlantic United States. While their filtering activity and bio-deposition play an important role in the ecology of these systems, the reefs they form are one of the few sources of hard bottom habitat for fouling organisms and are the foundation of a rich biological community. This species has experienced drastic declines throughout the mid-Atlantic region in the last two centuries due to overfishing, habitat loss, and diseases. Much interest and effort is now focused on restoring this important commercial and
ecological resource. While oyster reef restoration is central to the recovery of this species and the habitat it creates, oyster aquaculture can provide many of these same services albeit on a smaller scale. We conducted a study to assess the macrofaunal communities associated with subtidal “modified rack and bag” aquaculture in 2006. Our study was designed to address two areas of concern associated with off-bottom bivalve culture. First, we compared the motile macro-epifaunal communities associated with oyster aquaculture cages and a created oyster reef. Second, we examined the impacts of oyster aquaculture cages on the underlying sediment and macro-infaunal community by comparison to a reference site of open sand/mud bottom.

We conducted this study in the southeast corner of Indian River Bay because this site is host to a five year old, created oyster reef that is the subject of ongoing research by the Center for Inland Bays. The subtidal oyster reef consisted of a 0.1 hectare base of surf clam (Spisula solidissima) shell capped with clusters of living C. virginica and C. virginica shell.

Twelve basket traps, consisting of the bottom 20cm of a 20L bucket, were deployed on the reef similar to Nestlerode (2004). Each basket was drilled with 12-40mm diameter holes to allow water and faunal exchange. Oyster clusters were collected directly from the reef. The oyster cages used in this study are known as “modified rack and bag” and consisted of 12 vinyl-coated, 25mm wire mesh cages (61 x 61 x 61 cm.) These cages were designed by Dr. Robert Rheault and are a smaller version of those described in Rheault and Rice (1995).

Cages were cleaned approximately every two weeks (depending on the level of fouling and sampling schedule) by removing bags from cages and scrubbing both with a plastic wire brush to remove fouling organisms and simulate commercial aquaculture practice. Faunal communities were likely affected by gear cleaning and therefore gear was consistently sampled two weeks after the most recent cleaning throughout the study.

All sampling occurred during spring low tide. Infauna sampling occurred two weeks following gear cleaning during spring low tide and was sampled concurrent with the cage sampling. All collected motile macro-epifauna and macro-infauna were sorted, identified and enumerated according to Pollock (1998). Sediment samples were obtained concurrently with core sampling.

Perhaps the most important, difference between the cages and the reef is the number of species that were found only in the oyster cages. Of the seventeen species found in the cages only eight of these, less than half, were also found on the reef. Juveniles of four reef-oriented fish species were unique to the cages. Blue crabs were also found only in the cages and were composed of molting adults and hard-shelled juveniles. Mud crabs and naked gobies were the most abundant species throughout the study and were similar in both habitats. Grass shrimp and oyster drills were more abundant in the oyster cages and were highly abundant in a few of the fall samples.

We obtained a significantly smaller percentage of silt and clay below the oyster cages but median grain size was similar between habitats. There were no clear trends in infaunal measures despite the erratic appearance of significantly reduced abundance and richness below the cages early fall. It is likely that the agitation of cages and consequent re-suspension of sediments and small polychaetes have a greater affect than the culture organisms themselves and account for the majority of the observed differences. The results of the silt and clay analysis are opposite what would be expected from fecal and pseudofecal enrichment from the oysters.

The results of our study show that, this method of oyster aquaculture supports additional populations of ecologically and economically important macrofauna compared to a created oyster reef. Furthermore we demonstrate that off-bottom oyster aquaculture operations in the mid-Atlantic US are a beneficial addition to host estuaries and associated natural communities. While there exists a broad range of variables contributing to the quality of these
two types of habitats our study shows that cultured oysters and cages can impart benefits to other species and the ecosystem as a whole. Even if oyster culture is not “better” than oyster reef creation, the habitat created is comparable and both have a beneficial effect on populations of other important macrofauna. These findings should be transferable to other estuaries, especially those with limited hard bottom habitats.

Literature Cited


Dr. Ozbay’s summary with figures is found on the ECSGA website. The original paper is in the Journal of Shellfish Research and is titled, “Habitat Value of ‘Modified Rack and Bag’ Oyster Culture Gear & Man-made Oyster Reef.”

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Consider The Oyster – book review

by Kathy Rhodes
ECSGA Administrator

Consider The Oyster - A Shucker’s Field Guide was written by Patrick McMurray, co-owner (and oyster shucker) of the The Starfish Oyster Bed & Grill in Toronto. Patrick is a champion shucker (2002 World Champion) and lover of all things oyster. I recently spoke to Patrick at The Grand Central Oyster Bar’s Oyster Frenzy in New York City where he was competing in their shucking contest.

The book is fun and easy to read and full of information. The 150,000 year history of oysters, including the origin of the idea that they are aphrodisiacs, is covered in just three pages. The next few pages describe the life history, culture and internal anatomy of oysters in a manner that is easy to understand, even for the newbie. Patrick learned about oysters only after he started shucking them and this has influenced his approach to teaching others about his passion. The information on history etc. is included to enhance the enjoyment of oysters. The major part of the book is about how to enjoy oysters, starting with how to taste the subtle differences between varieties. Patrick also discusses how to buy, store, shuck and present oysters for the table and even what libations go best with oysters. If you prefer to have someone else shuck your oysters for you, the book includes a extensive, annotated list of the more famous oysters bars in Canada, the US and England. The last chapter is “the art of shucking” where you can read the shucking biographies of a half dozen of the best shuckers in the world, including the East Coast’s George Hastings and Chopper Young.
Membership Questions

by Bob Rheault
Executive Director

When I approach growers about joining the ECSGA I often hear that they are members through their state association. This $10 Association Membership is a great way to join and stay on top of issues through our newsletter, but the Association cannot function with these dues alone. We still need growers to step up and join as full members if we are to continue to function effectively. Ten dollars barely covers the cost of printing and mailing the newsletters. To be able to travel to DC to lobby for issues and research dollars, and to cover the administrative costs of running the Association we need the support of industry members, dealers, equipment suppliers and restaurants. In these challenging times I know it is often difficult to make ends meet, but we are counting on you to look up from your desk to see the larger picture of an industry that needs a voice. We provide that voice to support our industry both in DC and in many local battles. We ensure that you have a political and regulatory climate that allows you to keep working. Our efforts delivered funds for the Milford Lab when their money ran out. We are working on ways to expand markets for our products. We want to do more, but we can’t do it without your support. If you are already a member, give yourself a pat on the back. If not, please join us and tell us how we can be more effective working on your behalf.

Romancing the Clam

Soon after the highly successful Oyster Tasting event in Warwick, RI this past April we started planning for a clam tasting event to be held in Savannah, GA in conjunction with the National Shellfisheries Association meeting on March 23rd. We are inviting chefs to come down to prepare regional clam dishes for an audience of clam lovers and food writers and we hope to video tape all of the preparations for distribution on DVD, the web and recipe cards. Growers groups from several regions are invited to sponsor a chef to represent their product. Steve Otwell’s oyster flavor characterization specialists from the University of Florida will try to see if they can identify similar flavor distinctions in raw hard clams from each region. The whole event is designed to get the food press excited about sustainably-cultured clams and hopefully expand our market to prevent further downward price pressure.

For information contact Bob Rheault, bob@moonstoneoysters.com (401) 783-3360.
French Researchers Identify Mysterious Oyster Killer

The French oyster industry has been devastated by the abrupt die-off of juvenile oysters, aged 12 to 18 months. This summer between 40 and 100 percent of these oysters died. Now researchers from France's main marine research institute, Ifremer, say they've found the cause of the mysterious blight: The oysters have been infected with a herpes virus called Oyster Herpes virus type 1 (OsHV-1).

A warm winter and wet spring and resultant phytoplankton blooms allowed the young oysters to grow and mature rapidly, but left them particularly vulnerable to this disease. All of France's oyster areas, are affected by high mortality rates except one area at Arcachon in the southwest. Scientists do not know why Arcachon oysters have been spared but that stock may have some resistance to the widespread disease. The harvests of 2009 to 2011 will be sharply reduced as a result of the infection. The incident has been viewed as a looming gastronomical crisis in France.

France produces about 110,000 metric tons of oysters a year, according to Ifremer data. It is the world's fourth biggest producer after China, which alone accounts for 83 percent of world production, followed by Korea and Japan.

More Hurricane Trouble for the Gulf Coast

Our brethren in the oyster in industry of the Gulf of Mexico were finally beginning to recover from Hurricane Katrina of 2005 when two more hurricanes, Gustav and Ike, hit the region this past September. It is still unclear how much damage has been done to the industry, particularly in Texas and Louisiana, by those storms. Harvest areas along most of the region were closed because of water quality concerns and the longer-term effects on oyster stocks haven't yet been yet assessed. Commercial infrastructure has been impacted and many boats were damaged or sunk. The destruction of the densely populated Galveston Bay area sent a great deal of debris into the coastal water forcing the entire bay to be closed to all vessel traffic and making trawling difficult if not impossible.

While Florida oystermen were spared the wrath of the recent hurricanes, a different problem threatens the industry there. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have introduced a plan to further reduce the minimum freshwater flow into the Apalachicola River to allow more water for ever-expanding metropolitan Atlanta. Florida has sued the Corps, saying the plan would endanger some protected brackish water species in the Apalachicola estuary system. And Apalachicola oystermen are worried that resulting increased salinity levels in the bay could destroy the oyster beds.

Upcoming Events

- **International Conference on Shellfish Restoration (ICSR)**, November 19-22, 2008 in Charleston, South Carolina.
- **Northeast Aquaculture Conference and Exposition (NACE)**, December 3-5, 2008 in Portland, Maine.
- Molluscan Shellfish Institute's Annual "Walk on the Hill" January 26-30, 2009 in Washington, DC. We will start with our National Molluscan Shellfish Committee meeting on Monday, January 26th and our annual “Let the World be Your Oyster Reception” will be on Wednesday, January 28.

29th Milford Aquaculture Seminar, February 23-25, 2009 in Meriden, Connecticut. Including the ECSGA Annual meeting!

101st meeting of the National Shellfisheries Association, March 22-26, 2009 in Savannah Georgia.


International Conference on Molluscan Shellfish Safety, June 14-19, 2009 in Nantes, France.

Links to more information are available on the Upcoming Events page of the ECSGA website. www.ECSAG.org

Walk on the Hill

Once again the ECSGA will be sending a contingent of growers to DC to push our agenda and raise awareness about our issues with our elected representatives. This year’s trip will be January 26-28 with our “Let the World be Your Oyster” Congressional Reception to be held again at the Acadiana Restaurant on that Wednesday. Our lobbying efforts are always better received when we walk in with growers from that Congressman’s district so if you can spare a day to join us it would be a big help. We are lining up sponsors for the reception and will be asking growers to donate product to be served. This is a great event and a good opportunity to build ties with the new administration. We hope you can join us. Contact Bob Rheault for information.

A Year of Oysters

by Kathy Rhodes
ECSGA Administrator

Several East Coast events featuring oysters and oyster shuckers were held during the year.

The Greater Charleston Restaurant Association hosted its annual Oyster Festival in January. This event has been the highlight of Charleston, South Carolina’s “January-doldrums” for the past 25 years. Main events include the legendary “Oyster Shucking & Eating Contest,” a beer and wine tasting tent, live bands and a Kids Corner (complete with a petting zoo). Tres Hundertmark, chef of the Lobster Trap Restaurant in Asheville, NC, placed first in the oyster speed shucking competition, opening as many raw oysters as possible in three minutes. Hundertmark blasted the opposition away with an amazing 69 oysters in three minutes. He credits his success to focus, organization and bare feet. Hundertmark had come to Charleston with the Asheville Independent Restaurant Association and attended the Oyster Festival and met with its organizers to learn how they've developed an event that attracts over 10,000 guests.

The Nantucket Wine Festival in May has grown over the past eleven years to be one of the region’s most celebrated wine and food events. This year’s “Grand Tasting” event featured a dozen types of oysters from the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association at two raw bars and wines from more than 150 of the world's great wineries. As this was a tasting event, no condiments were allowed other than lemons -- even perfume was discouraged. This was a true showcase of the subtle differences between the different wines and oysters. Also, at one of a series of wine and food seminars, Seth and Angela Raynor, proprietors of the Boarding House and the Pearl restaurants, Skip Bennett, of Island Creek Oysters and winemaker Cyril Brun from Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin presented various takes on the noble oyster, pairing each dish with the
perfect wine. “Oyster gurus” Rob Garrison and Ed Rhodes were on hand as representatives of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association to answer the audience’s questions.

August marked the 34th Annual Milford Oyster Festival. The tens of thousands of visitors to Milford, Connecticut had a choice of activities including entertainment for children and music fans, canoe and kayak races, over 200 arts and crafts vendors from around the country, a classic car show and tremendous food offered by non-profit civic organizations, including the ECSGA. Although some growers complained that it was early in the season and the oysters might be “skinny” the oysters were WONDERFUL! About $200,000 was raised for local charities including a substantial amount for the ECSGA (This is the ECSGA’s major fundraising event.) Thanks AMOF! Grand Central Oyster Bar Executive Chef Sandy Ingbar and ECSGA Officers Bob Rheault and Gef Flimlin served as judges for the shucking contest. And this year oyster shells were saved and will be recycled to seed oyster beds.

In honor of the hard working Massachusetts shellfishermen and women, the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association (MAA) celebrated its first Shellfish Shindig in September. The growers offered oysters, quahog clams and steamers by the bucket, prepared in their favorite styles. Seafood enthusiasts enjoyed shellfish raw, fried or steamed in beer at the Samuel Adams Brewery in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston. “Shellfish farming is one of the most sustainable fishing methods, and the Shellfish Shindig is a way for New Englanders to meet area shellfishers, enjoy delicious food prepared with seafood grown in the clean, cold waters of Massachusetts, and learn more about the eco-friendly harvesting practices the aquaculture industry uses in our own backyard,” says MAA President Bob Tourigny.

The Grand Central Oyster Bar’s Oyster Frenzy, also held in September featured wine and a wide variety of oysters in the georgous oyster bar “below sea level” in Grand Central Terminal in New York City. This year, an oyster bar employee, Felix Guzman took first place in the shucking contest among a field that included former Canadian Champion, Patrick McMurray and nine other first class shuckers. ECSGA’s Executive Director, Ed Rhodes, served as one of the judges for the shucking contest. Meanwhile, in the other room, NY city bartender and TV host, Stephen Phillips, shared his recipe for the Steve-Oyster Shooter.

Also in September, Island Creek Oysters of Duxbury, Massachusetts had a very successful third annual “beach party” dubbed, appropriately, “The Island Creek Oyster Festival”. They raised tens of thousands of dollars for local charities while revelers enjoyed live music, an “Oyster Slurp” contest (no hands), oyster shooters. Three chefs from Boston were also on hand to serve their special oyster recipes.

The St. Mary’s Oyster Festival, including the US National shucking championship, occurred in October in Leonardtown, Maryland. This oyster festival, running for 41 years, showcases the opening of the oyster season on the Chesapeake and celebrates the tradition of men and women making their living working the waters Bay. Visitors from across the country attend for the good food, local crafts, oyster cook-off, live entertainment and especially the nationally recognized shucking contests. The National Oyster Shucking
Championship Contest featured the fastest men and women shuckers from ten states. Every year, the winner competes in the International Oyster Festival in Galway Ireland. As the St. Mary’s website says, “Congratulations to our 2007 winner, William “Chopper” Young, the 2008 World Champion "Oyster Opener" in Galway, Ireland!” Way to go Chopper!! And, since he successfully defended his title at St. Mary’s, he’ll be back to Europe next September!

Oysters were featured in one of the “Cooking with the Chefs” presentations at the three-day North Carolina Seafood Festival and Carteret Community College culinary students served up clam dishes in partnership with the Shellfish Growers Association.

And also in October, the second annual Maine Oyster Fest, highlighted oysters from Maine and New Hampshire. Wiley Point oysters in Damariscotta, Maine, won the 2008 Maine Oyster of the Year award and Pemaquid Oysters, also from Damariscotta won the People's Choice Best Maine Oyster. The J.P.’s Shellfish Maine Oyster Shucking Competition was won by Nate Perry of J's Oyster Bar in Portland, Maine. The Maine Oyster Luge Championships, back by popular demand at this year's event, was won by the Roman Cooper team of North Haven Oyster Co. of North Haven, Maine. The cooking contest featured dishes from seven local restaurants and Chef Taylor Miller from Inn on the Blues in York Beach, Maine, walked away with the 2008 Chef of the Year award at this year's event at the Union Bluff Meeting House in York Beach on Sunday. Justin Walker, chef at Arrows in Ogunquit, Maine, won the 2008 People's Choice Best Chef award. Proceeds from the event benefit the York Fisherman's Fund.

And finally, Old Ebbitt Grill, in Washington, DC institution, hosts the annual Oyster Riot every November.

Sorry if I have missed your favorite event. Just write up a summary and if may well appear in the next newsletter!

The mission of the ECSGA is to promote responsible commercial shellfish aquaculture through market research and promotion, active involvement in public education, participation in policy formation at the state and national levels, and directed research.
Mail Membership form and dues to:
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Contents of this Issue

From the Mouth of the Bay ................................................................. page 1
Leadership Changes in the ECSGA .................................................. page 2
From the New President ................................................................. page 3
Habitat Value of Oyster Culture Gear ............................................ page 3
Consider The Oyster – book review ................................................. page 5
Membership Questions ................................................................. page 6
Romancing the Clam ................................................................. page 6
French Researchers Identify Mysterious Oyster Killer ....................... page 7
More Hurricane Trouble for the Gulf Coast .................................... page 7
Upcoming Events ........................................................................ page 7
Walk on the Hill ........................................................................ page 8
A Year of Oysters ....................................................................... page 8

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