The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association represents over 1,000 shellfish farmers from Maine to Florida. These proud stewards of the marine environment produce sustainable farmed shellfish while providing thousands of jobs in rural coastal towns. The ECSGA informs policy makers and regulators to protect a way of life.

The recent publication of the Virginia Shellfish Aquaculture Situation and Outlook Report shows that oyster culture increased in Virginia from 6.2 million planted in 2005 to 76.6 million planted in 2010; and from 0.8 million harvested in 2005 to 16.9 million harvested in 2010. The number planted last year would indicate a harvest of around 50 million oysters in Virginia over the next year.

Maryland also is ramping up oyster production as they attempt to make the transition from a wild fishery to an aquaculture-based industry. These increases in production without substantial new efforts in marketing do not bode well for pricing. While individual businesses should keep up their own marketing efforts to showcase the unique qualities of their product, the industry will need some larger-scale marketing efforts to move the much greater volume of product that is coming along.

Federal Specialty Crop designation could be of some help in getting marketing money, but shellfish compete with many other crops from berries to honey for the designation. The larger food products such as milk and pork have check-off programs that support generic advertising (Got Milk, The Other White Meat). We could develop a program like that on our own through the Gulf, Pacific and East Coast Shellfish Growers Associations if we all chose to do so.

Increasing food safety concerns at the federal level may well lead to Post Harvest Processing (PHP) for shellfish coming from areas where the bacteria *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* and *V. vulnificus* are prevalent (and probably for all shellfish, eventually). This will have a profound effect on the structure of existing shellfish businesses. The FDA's own study concluded that many oyster businesses in the Gulf could not afford even the smallest available versions of equipment for PHP.

Requiring PHP could force many small producers (and probably some larger ones) out of business under

— Continued on page 5
Updated FDA *Hazard Guide* Stresses Post Harvest Processing of Shellfish

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

If there was ever any doubt about where the FDA is heading with its policy on *Vibrio* in shellfish, the agency’s new *Fish and Fishery Products Hazards and Controls Guidance, 4th edition* makes it abundantly clear with the addition of a brand new chapter on Post Harvest Processing of shellfish. This ten-year update of the so-called *Hazard Guide* is a product of the FDA’s Seafood HACCP Alliance, a group that provides guidance to seafood processors and regulators on which hazards are “reasonably likely to occur” and what steps processors must implement in their HACCP plans to mitigate or control each potential risk. (HACCP stands for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point).

New approaches to risk

The revised *Hazard Guide* updates information on methods to mitigate or eliminate risks from hazards such as red tide, worms in fish fillets, histamine in tuna, and bacteria in ready-to-eat products. Those familiar with Seafood HACCP will find that much remains the same, although there are significant updates on histamine and botulism, and renewed emphasis on thermometer accuracy and calibration, and temperature recorders, for ensuring that fishery products do not undergo time/temperature abuse.

If they are not doing so already, you can expect your regulators to start enforcing new mandates for temperature recorders in our coolers and on common carriers’ trucks.

One of the most significant changes in the new edition of the *Hazard Guide* is the addition of Chapter 17, entitled, “Pathogenic Bacterial Survival Through Processes Designed to Maintain Raw Product Characteristics.” This chapter outlines pathogen control strategies and “validated post harvest processing (PHP) methods to control certain potentially pathogenic *Vibrio* bacteria in raw molluscan shellfish.” The processes discussed include high hydrostatic pressure (HPP), individual quick freezing with extended frozen storage, “mild heat processing” and irradiation. Paradoxically, these are described as “processes intended to retain raw product characteristics.”

The FDA declares it “reasonably likely” that an unsafe level of *V. vulnificus* could enter the process from oysters harvested from states “associated with two or more V.p. illnesses.”

The likelihood of unsafe levels of *V. parahaemolyticus* being present runs to a half-page of conditions, including if the waters of the state have been confirmed as the original source “associated with two or more V.p. illnesses in the past three years.”

In the HACCP step where processors are required to identify Critical Control Points (CCP) for product intended for raw consumption, the emphasis is on these new PHP processes, but fortunately they leave the window open for continued use of the receiving step as the CCP for product intended for raw consumption. I hope we can keep this window open, but *I wonder how long we can prevent the FDA from forcing PHP on the industry.*

In January at the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) Board of Directors meeting, FDA officials clearly stated that they still believe PHP is the best method of addressing the risk of *Vibrio* illness. (See the May 2011 ECSGA newsletter.) The FDA has clearly outlined the conditions under which they feel the hazard is “reasonably likely to occur.”

It may be just a matter of time before they decide the receiving step is no longer an appropriate CCP for this hazard. This would force much of our industry to either shut down during the summer months or implement one of the costly, approved PHP processes.

It will be interesting to see the FDA’s implementation strategy at the annual ISSC meeting slated for October 1-7 in Seattle. Congress has told the agency that if it intends to implement new guidance mandating PHP of shellfish, it must work through the ISSC. Meanwhile, many states are in the throes of budgetary crises and are laying off staff and restricting travel. We need to make sure that our states are well represented at the ISSC annual meeting, so please ask your state shellfish authorities if they have received travel authorization to attend this important meeting.
Connecticut Sea Grant to Hire Shellfish Extension Specialist

The Connecticut Sea Grant Extension Program recently received a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to hire a new shellfish extension specialist. The new employee will work with program staff to expand aquaculture development in the state in an effort to retain and/or create jobs. In addition to offering aquaculture training opportunities for prospective producers and resource managers, the extension specialist will work with producers seeking innovative ways to market aquaculture products.

The first project will be an investigation into the feasibility of a community-supported aquaculture (CSA) program in collaboration with the Noank Aquaculture Cooperative in Groton. Similar to community-supported agriculture programs, the new aquaculture program will allow local citizens to invest in an aquaculture farm prior to the production season, investing along with the farmer and, upon harvest, receiving a return of fresh, local shellfish.

“We see this as a way to help resolve the disconnect among consumers, food production and farmers,” says Tessa Getchis, Connecticut Sea Grant’s aquaculture extension specialist. “It will provide the community with access to fresh seafood and support the local economy.” A study is currently underway to assess the program’s appeal to the broader community. If the program generates enough interest, it may create new jobs in Connecticut and serve as a model for other states. To learn more about CSAs, check out the next issue of Connecticut Sea Grant’s newsletter, The Dredge.

For more information, contact Tessa Getchis, Connecticut Sea Grant, (860) 405-9104 or Tessa.getchis@uconn.edu.

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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 the home-page of 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.
From the Mouth of the Bay

Deficit Woes Impact Our Industry

No matter what your political persuasion, the politics of the past few months (and the attending stock market gyrations) have probably been enough to rattle your nerves and shatter any faith you may have had in our government. Personally, I have found the new political environment incredibly frustrating.

First, Congress failed to pass the FY2010 budget, dashesing hopes for a $3-million-per-year Shellfish Breeding Center that would have brought ample resources to five states, ensuring accelerated development of disease-resistant lines. Then there was a ban on earmark spending, which has been a way for our association to garner support for numerous research projects. Most recently I learned that the USDA-ARS geneticist who was to be hired this month at the University of Rhode Island was the victim of a hiring freeze.

You may think we have enough disease-resistant shellfish lines, but massive mortalities from MSX in Damariscotta, Maine and Duxbury, Mass, accompanied by mortalities due to SSO (*Haplosporidium costale*) in Rhode Island have hammered home the need for additional selective-breeding work.

Meanwhile, many programs we count on are being cut. Weather prediction will suffer when NOAA can’t replace its aging weather satellites, and New Hampshire decided to eliminate its shellfish sanitation program altogether. (We heard that this funding has since been reinstated, but were unable to confirm by press time). Many states won’t let their shellfish sanitation representatives travel to the ISSC meeting in Seattle in October, which makes me wonder if the industry will be able to muster the votes needed to keep the FDA from pushing through mandatory Post Harvest Processing.

As NOAA tries to implement its new aquaculture policy, it looks as if it will have to do so with even less funding than it had last year, and the USDA will probably hack funding for the Regional Aquaculture Centers – that’s if they don’t eliminate the program altogether.

Some are rejoicing that the FDA may not have money to enforce its regulations, but I caution that when you have strict regulations without adequate enforcement you end up being like dozens of third-world countries. Only the honest producers end up paying to follow the rules and there is a strong dis-incentive for compliance.

If industry standards slip, you can be certain that there will be more shady operators and more cases of food poisoning. We could see a drastic drop in consumer confidence as people shy away from our products.

What are we supposed to do? If there are no earmarks, why are we going to DC each year? While some predict this is the new “normal” in DC, I don’t think people will settle for drastic cuts to government services that they have come to take for granted. I expect the pendulum will swing back at some point. Some level of spending cuts is probably prudent, but once we start creating jobs, the government should have adequate revenues to pay its debts and fund research, too.

Meanwhile, we still need to explain to our elected representatives what it is we do, and why we need their help with our issues. If we can’t ask for money we can at least push for regulatory relief. We need to be ready to explain why our research programs are not “corporate welfare” or we will need to find ways to pay for them ourselves.

For more information on Vibrios visit www.ECSGA.org and click on Vibrio Issues in the What’s New box on the right side of our homepage.
their current business structures.

This should get us thinking about the possibilities of co-op arrangements for some shellfish producers. Smaller growers could sell to a larger grower or possibly to a larger distributor who has the finances and the scale needed to buy and fully utilize the very expensive PHP equipment. Larger-scale operators could also address the costs of marketing the increasing volume of shellfish being grown.

I hope that we can continue to have small, independent shellfish growers who can market their unique story to their customers. The “Buy Local” trend fits right in with that business model, but we must be aware of other trends, often beyond our control, that can render our business models obsolete.

Always have a Plan B.

— Continued from page 1

Can Your Business Plan Adapt?

Eating Fish Reduces Risk of Eye Disease

Regularly consuming fish and the omega-3 fatty acids found in fish is associated with a significantly reduced risk of developing Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) in women, according to a report posted online in the June issue of Archives of Ophthalmology.

Researchers at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston examined data on 38,022 women in the Women's Health Study who had not been diagnosed with AMD. Information on the women's eating habits was obtained via questionnaire at the beginning of the study and included information on intake of omega-3 fatty acids found in fish.

During ten years of follow-up, additional questionnaires tracked the women's eye health, specifically focusing on the diagnosis of AMD.

Results showed that eating one or more servings of fish per week, when compared to eating less than one serving per month, was associated with a 42 percent lower risk of AMD, which the researchers said "appeared to be due primarily to consumption of canned tuna fish and dark-meat fish."

The authors concluded that, "regular consumption of [omega-3 fatty acids] and fish significantly reduced the risk of incident AMD."

From www.maculardegenerationassociation.org

— Photo courtesy of Bausch.com

Normal vision, left, compared with vision affected by Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), right.
Virginia Aquaculture Conference 2011

Mark your calendars for the upcoming Virginia Aquaculture Conference on November 18-19 in Williamsburg, Va. This is a one-stop-shop to hear the latest in shellfish culture activities, meet vendors and mingle with other culturists. Register today at www.vaaquacultureconference.com.

Highlights of this year’s conference include a session for up-and-coming culturists, ISSC meeting wrap-up, a post-harvest-processing panel discussion with insights from Gulf Coast and West Coast industry leaders and an update on NOAA’s shellfish initiative. Don’t miss this exciting event! More details can be found on the website; registration is open. Agenda and sponsor information will be updated on a regular basis.

For more information, contact Karen Hudson at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, (804) 684-7742 or khudson@vims.edu.

Upcoming Events in 2011 and 2012

37th Annual Milford Oyster Festival, Aug. 19-20, Milford, CT. Contact (203) 878-5363 or visit www.milfordoysterfestival.org.


Maryland Seafood Festival, Sept. 10-11, Annapolis, MD. Contact Alicia Hartlove, (202) 263-2574 or visit mdseafoodfestival.com.

4th International Oyster Symposium, Sept. 15-18, Hobart, Australia. Contact 0458 601 057 or visit www.oysterstasmania.org.

Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference, Oct. 1-7, Seattle, WA. Contact (803) 788-7559 or visit www.issc.org.


Virginia Aquaculture Conference, Nov. 18-19, Williamsburg, VA. Contact Karen Hudson, (804) 684-7742 or khudson@vims.edu or visit www.vaaquacultureconference.com.

Virginia Aquaculture Conference, Nov. 18-19, Williamsburg, VA. Contact Karen Hudson, (804) 684-7742 or khudson@vims.edu or visit www.vaaquacultureconference.com.

Virginia Aquaculture Conference, Nov. 18-19, Williamsburg, VA. Contact Karen Hudson, (804) 684-7742 or khudson@vims.edu or visit www.vaaquacultureconference.com.

Aquaculture America, Feb. 29 - March 2, Las Vegas, NV. Contact (225) 578-3137 or visit www.was.org.

Links and more information available on the Events page at www.ECSGA.org.

We Need Your Help!

Please lend a hand and volunteer to help out at these two upcoming festivals.
The income generated will fund most of ECSGA’s 2012 operating budget.

Milford Oyster Festival
Fri, Aug. 19 – Sat, Aug. 20

Maryland Seafood Festival
Sat, Sept. 10 – Sun, Sept. 11

Contact Kathy Rhodes, (203) 623-2819 or ecsga@optonline.net
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floats, inflatable buoys, Hot dip galvanized auger
anchors, specialty traps for marine predators, and a
lot more cool stuff for folks working on the water

Thanks for looking
NOAA Shellfish Initiative Survey Results

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

The results are in from the July ECSGA survey conducted to help inform the NOAA Shellfish Initiative. Many thanks to the 40 growers and 40 individuals in related fields (dealers, extension agents, researchers) who filled out the survey. Here are some of the highlights.

Top-ranking priorities, in order of preference:
1. document ecological benefits;
2. research ecological concerns;
3. implement Best Management Practices;
4. conduct marine spatial planning and pre-permitted zoning;
5. support oyster gardening programs.

On marketing
80% think marketing increases demand and profit.
80% believe the key to developing new markets is getting folks who have never eaten shellfish to try some.
60% think marketing should focus on inland states.
50% believe markets are strong and expect prices to remain steady even if production increases.
50% would support a marketing board funded by a universal tag fee of a few cents.
50% want more local marketing opportunities.
18% think marketing is a waste of money.
13% believe that lowering price would lead to increased demand.

On Vibrio and Post Harvest Processing (PHP)
100% think consumers should be allowed to make an informed choice whether to eat raw shellfish. (It is pretty rare that this group agrees on anything!)
100% believe they are well informed about *Vibrio* and take steps to manage risks.
96% support expenditures on consumer education.
90% believe that consumers prefer raw shellfish to those subjected to PHP.
90% want NOAA to develop novel treatments that lower *Vibrio* counts without forcing industry to subject shellfish to PHP.

On NOAA’s efforts to promote shellfish aquaculture
99% believe NOAA should train internal staff on the ecological benefits of shellfish aquaculture.
96% believe NOAA should work to preserve working waterfronts.
88% think NOAA should conduct research comparing the habitat value of eelgrass with that of shellfish.
88% want NOAA to enhance wild populations to benefit habitat and water quality.
77% believe NOAA should develop aquaculture opportunities offshore.

On restoration efforts and sanctuaries
86% believe sanctuaries lead to the development of disease resistance.
80% of growers would like to participate in restoration projects.
68% believe sanctuaries are not disease reservoirs.
67% think restoration efforts should continue in closed waters.

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13% believe that lowering price would lead to increased demand.

One of the reasons *V. vulnificus* illnesses are so rare is that only immune-compromised individuals are affected. This includes those taking immuno-suppressive drugs; those with liver disorders (including hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver cancer), hemochromatosis (where too much iron is deposited in tissues and organs), or diabetes; and those with weakened immune systems due to treatments for organ transplants, HIV/AIDS or cancer.

If you’re not sure about your vulnerability, ask your doctor.

Subscribe today!

*Fish Farming News* is the aquaculture industry’s national newspaper, devoted exclusively to coverage and the betterment of domestic aquaculture.

Content is geared toward active commercial fish and shellfish farmers, covering all major commercially cultured species, in freshwater and saltwater, warmwater and coolwater, and both open and closed production systems.

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To subscribe, call (800) 989-5253 or e-mail <jncarter@fish-news.com>.
Carbon Footprint Label Approved for Chinese Sea Scallops

by Kathy Rhodes

Last year sea scallops became China’s first food product bearing a carbon footprint label. As a measure of total environmental impact, carbon footprints are measured in units of carbon dioxide emitted, and many food businesses are starting to use the carbon-footprint measure as a tool for understanding and maximizing supply-chain efficiency.

If you were to calculate a person’s carbon footprint, you’d have to factor in the amount of carbon dioxide emissions resulting from home energy consumption and transportation, as well as emissions generated by the production, distribution and eventual waste breakdown of all the products the person uses.

Carbon labeling, pioneered in the U.K. by the nonprofit Carbon Trust, commits manufacturers to reducing carbon output. A study by the Carbon Trust found that two-thirds of U.K. consumers want to know the carbon footprint of the products they use, and a study by a Japanese government agency showed that carbon footprint labels “create value” for a food product. According to the Financial Times of London, nearly everyone in the U.K. has bought into the “low-carbon economy,” where more than $3.3 billion worth of goods bearing carbon labels have now been sold. Chief Executive of PepsiCo UK Richard Evans said, “The carbon reduction logo is a public commitment to reducing our carbon footprint year-on-year and ensures that we work hard to find innovative ways of making efficiencies at every step of our supply chain.”

Although a U.S. carbon-footprint-labeling program for food is not yet available, in July the International Standards Organization (ISO) published a set of standards intended to achieve consistency in the global carbon market and to maintain public confidence in greenhouse gas reporting and labeling.

SGS Group, one of the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification companies, determines the number of grams of carbon produced over a product’s entire lifecycle. The Zhangzidao Fishery Group requested the carbon-footprint label for its scallops in 2009, and SGS China calculated that 27,000 tons of three-year-old sea scallops grown in 2009 consumed 7,337 tons of carbon dioxide — equivalent to the carbon sink offered by 319,000 trees.

Carbon footprint labeling is another possible eco-label that shellfish growers might consider, especially since the carbon footprint of shellfish is generally much smaller than that of other proteins, such as red meat, as long as the product is not shipped by air.

— Continued from page 8

NOAA Shellfish Initiative Survey Results

Respondents also supported a laundry list of research objectives, with selective breeding for disease resistance being most commonly mentioned.

It was interesting to see the few questions where growers differed from those in other sectors. Growers were less likely to support a tag-fee-supported marketing board and less likely to agree that marketing should focus on those who have never tried shellfish. Growers also were less likely to agree that marketing would increase prices, and were significantly less enthusiastic about sustainability certification efforts.

The 16 dealers who responded were even more concerned about PHP than the other groups were. Most dealers (80%) felt they would not be able to pass costs on to consumers; however, while 85% of dealers reported significant summer sales, only 53% of them (vs. 62% of growers) felt they might not survive if summer harvests were curtailed.

Once again, thanks to all who participated.
Canada Overtakes New Zealand in Mussel Exports to United States

from SeafoodSource.com

According to import data from the National Marine Fisheries Service fresh, cultured-blue-mussel exports into the U.S. from Canada grew by 10 percent in 2010, overtaking New Zealand green mussels for the first time.

The value of the exports totaled $27.4 million last year, up from $26.7 million in 2009. Canada led mussel imports in 2010 with 47 percent of the market, compared with 42 percent for New Zealand.

Exported to the United States year-round, the rising exports have been attributed to marketing efforts by the Mussel Industry Council of North America, an association of producers, processors and industry groups from Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, dedicated to promoting fresh, blue-mussels in the U.S. and Canada.

“Surpassing New Zealand in mussels exported to the U.S. market is an important milestone for us,” said Terry Ennis, president of the Mussel Industry Council of North America. “For many years New Zealand has led in sales, importing frozen cooked mussels on the half shell. What we’re seeing now is the market respond[ing] to our product that is eco-friendly and available live and fresh all year round.”

For more info, visit www.discovermussels.com.

News You Can Use

Oyster Marketing Tips

Consistency

It goes without saying that consistently high quality is key to successful marketing, but just as important is consistency in the size of the product you ship. Don’t put different sizes in the same box. Oysters come in a range of sizes, rarely all uniform. Sort them as you pack, and sell specific sizes to the customers who prefer them. Variability is not what chefs want. Some prefer small, some large. Find out what each customer wants and fill that need. Customer service is huge. Address complaints aggressively.

Cleanliness

Oysters often come out of the water dirty and covered with growth, but a little pressure-washing does not cost much and makes a big difference in appearance. In fact, rinsing off silt is required by ISSC regulations. You wouldn’t buy fish wrapped in smelly, dirty paper — Why leave all that gunk on the shell? Pressure-washing an oyster costs only fractions of a penny and adds 5-10 cents to its value. Chefs know they won’t have to spend as much time scrubbing, and time is money. Also the oysters will smell clean and fresh when the customer opens up the box.

See more tips at www.ecsga.org/Pages/Marketing/Consumers.htm
Mail Membership form and dues to:
ECSGA c/o
Gef Flimlin
RCE of Ocean County
1623 Whitesville Road
Toms River, NJ 08755

Annual Dues Schedule

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Member Benefits:
Listing on our website for growers, dealers and hatcheries
Listing on our website for growers, dealers and hatcheries
Advertising for suppliers in our newsletters
Representation to Federal agencies on matters of coast-wide impact
Immediate response to press inquiries and shellfish illness reports

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