From the President
Independent Third-Party Certification

As bivalve farmers, we’ve long prided ourselves on being exemplars of agriculture’s sustainability elite. Not many agricultural sectors can claim not just environmental neutrality, but net positive environmental benefit. Leading independent guides and certification programs for responsible seafood rank bivalve culture at the top, including the Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch and the Aquarium of the Pacific’s Sustainable Seafood Forum, and environmental NGOs such as The Nature Conservancy and the Environmental Defense Fund. Until fairly recently groups such as the Marine Stewardship Council certified only wild-caught seafood suppliers, and there were no widely accepted standards for sustainable aquaculture practices. Several groups established aquaculture guidelines, while others, such as the World Wildlife Fund and the Global Aquaculture Alliance, developed acceptable practices for some farmed species.

Many of these entities work in conjunction with one another. Some provide contaminant testing and guidelines. Some provide seafood guides. You’ve probably seen them: green, most sustainable; yellow, some concerns; red, unsustainable.

Third-party certification

Another approach is private, independent, third-party certification. It started with finish aquaculture, which has had a mixed record environmentally. But certification makes less sense for inherently environmentally high-performing aquaculture such as shellfish, even though some buyers now require it.

I understand the appeal of this certification. There is the consumer security of seeing that one label says it all – that all of a seller’s farmed seafood is certified sustainable. Sellers can demonstrate a full chain of custody, from hatchery to consumer. And that each farm, not just a farming method, measures up. But for small operations the cost of independent, third-party certification can mean a lot of money, for it comes out of growers’ pockets. At the risk of sounding like a grumpy old waterman, sustainability has economic as well as environmental components. In the push for greater local sourcing, some local growers, most of them small, may get pushed out.

I fear that independent, third-party certification could be more anchor than balloon, especially when costs such as the certifier’s travel, which growers also pay, are open-ended. Should farmers have to increase selling prices to recoup these added costs, the move could backfire if it leads to decreased sales, helping no one.

To the best of my knowledge there are no unsustainable bivalve farms in the U.S. That’s not to say that it cannot be done. Too much of a good thing can become a bad thing, especially in the wrong location. However, U.S. growers are heavily regulated and usually find that if they exceed certain limits it hurts their production and they back off. But I ask, since no U.S. bivalve farm has ever been branded as unsustainable, why should we have to pay huge fees just to prove we are sustainable, when everyone agrees we already are?

Evaluating Our Elected Representatives

by Bob Murtha,
Matunuck Oyster Farm, R.I.

As a farman for Matunuck Oyster Farm I love to talk to customers about how we grow our product, the care we take and some of the challenges we face. In September I had the opportunity to tell our story to politicians and regulators in Washington, D.C. When the Ocean Conservancy (OC) was trying to make the case for additional research and monitoring funding to study ocean acidification, they came to the ECSGA and Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association (PCSGA) to ask for our help to “put a face on the issue.” They wanted to film a couple of short video pieces to help congressional staff learn about ocean acidification and the potential impact to our livelihoods. (See the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=7amtE33RKnQ).

Bob Rheault helped arrange video shoots with a number of growers in Virginia and Rhode Island, and I ended up with a starring role. When it came time to show our video in D.C. I was asked by Julia Roberson (director of the OC’s ocean acidification program) to come help make the case. I had previously worked under one of the East Coast’s “gurus” of acidification, Mark Green (Professor of Chemistry at St. Joseph’s College and owner of Peaks Island Shellfish Company). So I knew that acidified water threatened shellfish and other calcifiers so I was eager to see if we could find a way to help our industry adapt to this emerging challenge.

Bob and his counterpart, Margaret Barrett, Executive Director of the PCSGA, set up staff briefings with the Congressional Shellfish Caucus and the Senate Oceans Caucus. Their message to these groups was that as farmers and proud stewards of the resource we produce sustainable seafood with ecosystem benefits, and are local engines of green job growth and economic development in rural coastal communities.

— Continued on page 2
— Continued from page 1

Educating Our Elected Representatives

We asked them to support “Specialty Crop” designation for shellfish and to help us resolve our trade dispute with the EU. We explained our need for selective breeding research and how permitting delays are squelching job growth.

We were joined by West Coast growers Bill Dewey of Taylor Shellfish, John Lentz of Chelsea Farms, and Greg Dale of Coast Seafood Company. Growers on the West Coast have been hit by the upwelling of low-pH (acidified) waters, resulting in devastating hatchery production declines of up to 50 percent for the past several years. They are the proverbial “canaries in the coal mine” for the projected acidification impacts caused by global CO2 emissions.

On the East Coast we don’t have deep-water upwelling issues, but we experience localized acidification impacts caused by elevated CO2 from decomposing organic matter related to eutrophication. Globally we have seen pH declines by about 0.1 pH unit since the beginning of the industrial revolution. Since the pH scale is logarithmic, this represents a 30-percent increase in acid concentrations, but the impacts are not uniformly distributed. Projections are for another 0.2-0.4 unit decline by the end of the century. Since calcifying organisms such as corals and shellfish struggle to make shell in acidified waters, scientists are working to predict what this means for marine organisms that must adapt to changing conditions at an unprecedented pace.

As we briefed congressional staff we were joined by NOAA scientists Zdenka Willis and Libby Jewett. We explained our industry, described our economic impact and requested an expanded FY15 budget for NOAA’s Integrated Ocean Acidification Program. Expanded monitoring and research could help us better predict acidification impacts and develop adaptation mechanisms that will allow us to produce shellfish for decades to come. We also made the case for expanded research to Karen Hyun, the Department of Commerce’s Senior Policy Adviser for Energy and the Environment, and Kim Miller from the Office of Management and Budget.

The ECSGA and PCSGA also put together a well-attended Wine and Oyster Reception for Congressional representatives. We were joined by ECSGA president Dan Grosse and board members Chad Ballard, Johnny Shockley and Ed Rhodes among other ECSGA members and supporters. This event provided an incredible opportunity for us to explain our industry’s challenges directly to about 100 representatives and senators while they enjoyed fine wine and sampled oysters from both the East and West Coasts.

Bob Rheault also made a brief presentation on the impacts of climate change on shellfish aquaculture to the Democratic Senatorial Outreach Committee in the Capitol Building. The audience included 15 senior senators and about 40 staff members. (see ecsga.org/Pages/Issues/Acidification/ClimateImpactsOnShellfishAqu.pdf).

It became clear to me in these meetings that the PCSGA and ECSGA play vital roles in sustaining our industry, and we can amplify our political influence by partnering with well-funded groups like the Ocean Conservation and the Natural Resources Defense Council to work toward common goals. We may not agree on everything, but if we focus on our shared concerns we can be very effective working together.

I really enjoyed my trip to Washington. It was a real eye-opener to learn of the enormous amount of work our associations do for the industry. I consider myself blessed to work for a great company and honored to speak on its behalf. I see the importance of maintaining a voice in politics and in educating our elected representatives. We have an excellent opportunity for growth in aquaculture in the U.S. Growers, hatcheries, restaurants, shellfish dealers and equipment suppliers should all support organizations like ECSGA because it ensures the future growth of the shellfish industry. I urge all who have a role in shellfish aquaculture to become members.

Thanks to the continued efforts of those in the OC, NOAA, PCSGA and ESCGA, and all those who are working to ensure a healthy shellfish aquaculture industry we can count on a brighter future. The world is our oyster.
Located in Wake, Va., near the Rappahannock River, Doug started out growing oysters and selling seed. Seeing an unfilled market for culture equipment, he and Irv began selling gear to the growing ranks of new oyster farmers. Initially they focused on winches, cages and bags, but soon were selling graders, upwellers and conveyors. They spent a large part of their day advising newbies so they wouldn’t repeat the mistakes Doug and Irv had made when they were starting out.

Doug was a water rat from a young age, and coming out of college he wanted to find a way to make a living on the Bay. So he took a job as the head of the Marine Science program at Christ Church School, a college prep school on the Rappahannock, at a time when Deromo, MSX, overharvesting and pollution had all but eradicated the Virginia oyster industry. Working with a group called Tidewater Oyster Gardeners (TOGA), Doug saw how waterfront dock owners were able to rear beautiful oysters to market size in under a year using disease-resistant spat from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS).

Doug decided to try developing ways to scale up these hobby farms and to put the oysters on the bottom to keep them out of sight. The early years were tough — his first crop was months old when Hurricane Isabel hit, and it was weeks before he could get out to tend his oysters. He was stoked to see his oysters were still in their cages, but without tending they had grown together into big clumps. He quipped, “In this business it is practically a prerequisite to kill millions before you make any money.”

When Doug first started out there were only a handful of oyster growers in Virginia. He recalls that the conventional wisdom at that time was “It can’t be done. Disease will kill them all.” But thanks to the development of disease-resistant lines and triploidy by geneticists at VIMS, “the impossible became profitable,” said Doug.

“Bringing our first crop to market was another lesson in humility. To reach the volumes we needed to get into real markets we needed more folks in the business. We put a bunch of videos up on YouTube and our website and ended up getting into the gear business as demand for cages and bags started to grow.”

Irv and Doug were always looking for better ways of doing things. The QuickTube Sorter™, hopper conveyors, table conveyors, all came as a result of incorporating mechanization to increase the productivity of their two-man operation. The methods and gear the pair developed allowed a small crew to handle large amounts of oysters.

“Our vision was always to figure things out on our own farm that would allow for the expansion of oyster aquaculture bay-wide.” Doug said. “When new growers come to us, we try to help them avoid the many mistakes we made. We use the gear we sell, so we know how it works.”

Doug explained that the “motto here at CBOC is: *Suck It Up.* We created *Suck It Up* t-shirts with a shucked oyster on them. People think we are talking about the oysters, but we know it’s what we say to ourselves when the work gets hard. Let’s face it, we work hard every day. That’s just the nature of the job.”

Doug continued, “I love the folks in this business. They are not afraid to work hard. They face down bad luck and bad weather. It’s their money and sweat and in the end most are successful, because instead of giving up, they sucked it up and went back to work. Our industry is awesome.”

Citing the issues challenging the industry — government over-regulation, water quality and waterfront homeowners who don’t want growing operations spoiling their waterfront — he acknowledged that some regulation is necessary for public health and safety. Nevertheless, Doug sometimes wonders if people will ever come to accept responsibility for their actions instead of depending on the “nanny state” to protect them. He points out the value of organizing as an industry to blunt the consequences of government overreach. “The cost of compliance with regulations and the need to protect one’s company from possible litigation is staggering and it gets worse every year.”

Doug really started to get animated when he got to the subject of NIMBY’s and access to waterfront. “It is not a new problem, and it is not going away.

— Continued on page 7
Everyone knows the long arm of the law reaches everywhere, but few expected the impact of October’s 16-day shutdown of the federal government to affect the shellfish industry. Nevertheless, that disruption caused the postponement of the biennial meeting of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC), since it relies heavily on the expertise and participation of many federal employees.

ISSC Chairman Keith Skiles said, “The decision to postpone the biennial meeting was difficult, and although the ISSC executive board knew that a last-minute date change would be disruptive, the board overwhelmingly expressed that it was far too important that we have a productive meeting. The ongoing government shutdown had already caused setbacks for our federal partners that would make a productive meeting unlikely if held at our original time.”

Skiles added, “The ISSC was fortunate that the St. Anthony Hotel was very accommodating, and quickly worked with the ISSC executive office to arrange a new time that would meet our needs.” The conference has been rescheduled for January 25-31, 2014 at the St. Anthony Riverwalk Hotel in San Antonio, Tex. It is expected that rooms will fill quickly, so if you have not yet made your reservation, now is the time. The hotel can be reached at (210) 277-4392.

Discussions regarding Vibrio parahaemolyticus are sure to be front and center in committee deliberations as well as at Task Force meetings. This past summer’s recalls in Virginia, Connecticut and Massachusetts, along with emergency closures in New York and New Jersey and the substantial increase in cases throughout the Northeast have appropriately raised the concerns of industry and regulatory members.

On the agenda for the meeting will be holdover proposals from previous years and many new proposals. Task Force I – which deals with classification and patrol of growing areas, laboratories and related topics – will address 13 lab method proposals, five dealing with Amnesiac Shellfish Poisoning, five with Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning, two with Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning and one thermal detection method. There are four proposals on a variety of growing-area issues, including Emergency Condition Contingency Plans, seed sources for aquaculture and relay, updates to the list of poisonous and deleterious substances and changes to the uses of the restricted classification.

Seven Task Force I proposals address wastewater treatment plants, wastewater treatment plant management plans, male specific coliphage and “microbes,” while five more proposals address laboratory evaluations.

Task Force II, charged with evaluating harvesting, handling and distribution concerns, has 12 Vibrio proposals on a variety of subjects slated for discussion, including control plans, requirements for states to develop the capacity to test for Vibrios, control plans for Mercenaria, water temperatures, risk per serving, shellstock cooling guidance, resubmerging of shellstock, and validation and verification. Three proposals address outbreaks and recalls, including the definition of an outbreak and reconditioning of recalled shellfish. Five other proposals to be discussed will cover identification of wet-stored shellstock, aquaculture facility inspections, and temperature-control issues such as sources of ice, and time for shucking. In addition, Vibrio cholera, depuration, plant inspections, bulk tagging and harvester/dealer training are also on the agenda.

Administrative issues are assigned to Task Force III, and include membership fee structure, adding a non-voting retail advisor to the executive board, state program evaluation, and who may vote on actions taken by the board between regular meetings of the conference. One proposal seeks to return to annual meetings of the conference, while others seek to streamline the laboratory method approval process and the development of growing-area classification criteria.

Industry participation at the biennial meetings of the ISSC is vital to the success of the conference. The perspectives of industry members from each region help to craft workable Model Ordinance requirements. If you haven’t already made your reservations, consider doing so now.

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**Traceability**

I wanted to draw your attention to a paper making the claim that traceability is free. If you follow food news, you likely have read about horse meat being sold as beef, tilapia being sold as high-priced fish, and all sorts of shellfish involving product misrepresentation that can damage markets and erode consumer confidence. Those of you who have had to undergo a product recall in the past season can probably see the advantages of having a computerized system tracking your product through to the consumer. I believe that if our industry had implemented better traceability requirements, we could have eliminated the need for regulators to go to the media during past recalls, since we would have known where all our product ended up. That alone would make it worthwhile in my opinion. For those who are concerned that their trademark is being abused, this type of system would eliminate the fraud and misrepresentation you suffer.

I have been hearing pushback from dealers who fear that this system would allow their customers to figure out who their suppliers are, thus allowing restaurants to cut out the middle-man and buy directly from the farm. In the systems I have seen there are ways to encode that information, preventing access by the end customer. I also believe that the middle-man provides a valuable service to the producer that many farmers would want to preserve.

The Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) Traceability Sub-committee has been evaluating various options for our industry. The FDA’s Food Safety Modernization Act has already imposed computerized traceability on the produce industry. Having done a study on the weakness of... — Continued on page 7
Milford Oyster Festival 2013

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

This year’s annual Milford Oyster Festival was yet another resounding success. The weather was gorgeous, the product was top-notch, the crowds were enthusiastic, the shuckers were amazing and the staff of supporting volunteers worked hard while remaining upbeat. I estimate we were serving oysters at a rate of over 60 a minute (4,000 an hour) for about five hours. We served 18,000 oysters and 4,000 clams from 18 farms in seven states. While it often felt like total chaos in the tent, things were well organized and we were able to keep things moving along, largely without a hitch. For the fourth year in a row we broke sales and income records, bringing in much-needed revenue to support our activities throughout the year.

Chopper Young (former Galway World Oyster Opening Champ) took home the top prize for the shucking contest for the third (or fourth?) time. Six-time National Champ Deborah Pratt from Jamaica, Va., took second place, while Gordon Weldon from Kimberly, Pa., took third. Richard Rush, editor of the Oyster Information Newsletter, served as our celebrity judge and photographer.

We were a little understaffed in the tent, so special kudos to the faithful volunteers who worked the two-day event (largely without breaks) and never stopped smiling. We couldn’t have done it without a whole raft of members (and their relatives) stepping up to help out: Bob and Mona Ketcham, Dale Leavitt, Cindy West and her mom Gail and their farm hand Carl, Brian Harmon, Nick Papa, Thanh Thanh Luu, Ben Goetsch, Ken “the clam machine” Shear, Ann and Sarah Rheault, Tom and Marion Rossi, Johnny and Nancy Shockley, Joe Gilbert and Nancy Follini, Pete Sebring, Ed Rhodes III, Kathy Waehter and dozens more.

Of course we couldn’t have pulled it off without generous donations of excellent quality products from our members.

— Continued on page 8
Workshops for Shellfish Growers in the Northeast
by Gef Flimlin,
Rutgers Cooperative Extension

This year the USDA Risk Management Education group awarded a grant to the East Coast Shellfish Research Institute for the purpose of conducting a series of workshops in the Northeast. These sessions follow on the Best Management Practices (BMPs) workshops that Sandy Macfarlane, Ed and Kathy Rhodes and I presented a few years ago.

It was clear from feedback following those workshops that although the BMPs made a nice manual, growers were not using them. As an offshoot of that program an Individual Farm Plan template was developed that growers could use to show their customers they were operating their farms in environmentally sound ways. We hope the Individual Farm Plan might relieve growers of costly and (what we considered to be) unnecessary third-party certification.

We have taken our Farm Plan template a step further. Growers can now create a tri-fold brochure and point-of-purchase marketing materials that can be printed at home or by a commercial printer. The underlying concept is that shellfish farmers are probably already operating in a very environmentally sound way.

The BMP manual (which is available for download at ecsga.org/Pages/Resources/BMP.html) gives excellent guidelines for this. The Individual Farm Plan takes those BMPs and allows growers to pick out the practices they use as they document their operations. Once printed out, growers can distribute the plans to their customers and show that they are operating in an environmentally sound way. Growers can then construct tri-fold brochures showing how their operations work, and include photos and stories about the farm and the family. These are great marketing tools to connect growers with customers.

Consumers will learn that they are buying local and supporting local families, without the grower having to seek approval from some third-party environmental NGO. This series of workshops for growers of clams and oysters is slated to take place near the end of January at various locations throughout the Northeast.

Participants can expect to go over the BMPs, get an introduction to the Individual Farm Plan concept, and get help making a plan with their personal information. Participants are invited to bring all the information they would need to complete the plan (actually not much, since most information is in their heads). After attending the workshop they should be able to create the tri-fold brochure at home using MS Word, but help will be available by phone or email if needed.

The sessions will also briefly discuss recordkeeping and dealing with dead and dying shellfish.

More detailed information about the workshops will come from each state’s Aquaculture Extension staff and will be circulated through the normal channels. Don’t forget to put these dates on your calendar so you’ll be able to attend. And hopefully it will be really cold, nasty, snowy, sleety, and high tide, so you won’t have any excuse not to be there.

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Individual Farm Plan and Brochure Workshops
(dates and locations are tentative)

Monday, Jan. 20. Lewes, Del.
Tuesday, Jan. 21. TBD, Md.
Wednesday, Jan. 22. Mays Landing, N.J.
Thursday, Jan. 23. Riverhead, N.Y.
Friday, Jan. 24. University of Connecticut, Avery Point, Conn.
Saturday, Jan. 25. TBD, R.I.
Monday, Jan. 27. Belfast, Me.
Tuesday, Jan. 28. TBD, N.H./North Shore, Mass.
Wednesday, Jan. 29. TBD, South Shore Mass./Cape and Islands

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Continued from page 3

**Chesapeake Bay Oyster Co.**

“We do our best to run a clean operation and be a good neighbor, but growers everywhere are being bought out or forced out by expensive legal battles. In the end, if you can’t get to the water, you can’t land your product and you can’t get paid. I believe we must do a better job of educating local officials to help them see the jobs we create, the money we put into the local economy and ecological benefits we provide.”

This led Doug to the subject of the formation of the Shellfish Growers of Virginia (SGV).

“While Virginia growers recognize the value of the ECSGA they also realized they needed to deal with issues on the state-level,” Doug noted. “As the Virginia industry grew, so did the challenges and the costs of dealing with them. Growers wanted to get out ahead of the problems and stop being in a reactive mode all the time. Forming the SGV was tough, but it lets us focus on growing our companies instead of spending all our time defending the industry.”

Doug says the SGV still counts on the ECSGA to help out with federal issues. “Some of our biggest battles are at the federal level and it takes numbers, an organization and a constant squeaky wheel to be heard, and Bob squeaks better than most.”

Doug concluded that, “despite all the challenges I still love my job. I love the people I work with and Irv is the best business partner anyone could hope for. We in Virginia are still just scratching at what the Bay used to produce. Demand is strong, and hard work is good for the soul. I am really enjoying seeing how far we can take this.”

Continued from page 4

**Traceability**

our paper-trail tag system, I expect the ISSC will soon be pushing for something like this for our industry as well.

In their paper "Traceability is Free: Competitive Advantage of Food Traceability to Value Chain Management," authors Martin Gooch and Brian Stirling make the case that while traceability is not quite free, it is affordable and the benefits greatly outweigh the costs. They also suggest that savings in the costs associated with hand-written data entry (and the repetition and errors associated therein) should cover the costs even if users don’t reap the claimed benefits.

What would you be willing to pay for trademark integrity and instant product recall?

— RBR
### Milford Festival 2013

Special kudos to Trisha Kozlowski, our new unflappable festival coordinator, and to Ed and Kathy Rhodes who have ensured smooth sailing of this event for ten straight years now by devoting many months to planning and execution!

Thanks also to the behind-the-scenes support staff, including Larry Williams, who let us use his walk-in cooler; Tom Kehoe, who coordinated receiving and whose truck delivered all our product and kept it cold all day; Joe Gilbert and Nancy Follini, who were a huge help from their nearby shellfish shop.

And of course, we couldn't have pulled it off without the 15 professional shuckers who came from as far away as Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia and Pennsylvania. They are a great group of friendly competitors with tremendous skills and stamina.

See great pics from the day at: photos.newhavenregister.com/2013/08/17/photos-milford-oyster-festival/

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### Importance of Industry Associations

The graph at right charts the responses of shellfishermen to a survey conducted by Bogdan Prokopovych, Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Rhode Island’s College of Business Administration.

Respondents said the three most important functions of industry associations were: informing them about threats, lobbying government representatives, and providing information about products and suppliers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitate exchange of information among shellfishermen about products and suppliers</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform shellfishermen about existing threats, such as shellfish diseases / invasive species</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate and lobby for regulatory support with government agencies or Congress</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiate with environmental NGOs</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>110</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop and monitor the adoption of the industry’s Best Management Practices</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in the development and monitoring of the adoption of voluntary certification</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>118</td>
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