From the Mouth of the Bay

A Call for Professionalism

A few weeks ago I attended the fall meeting of the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association, where President Bob Wallace gave a rousing opening address to his membership. I wanted to paraphrase some excerpts because I think we should all listen to what he said.

Who are we? We are the voice of the industry. We are the good guys. We are stewards of the environment. We make the water cleaner and we clean up after ourse lves. We are positive economic engines in our local community. We are job creators and we are fiercely independent. Frankly, a positive perception by the public is our best ally. Those who oppose this view can do our industry great harm. It is a privilege to farm in our coastal waters – not a right. We must act accordingly. Let us be a positive force.

Wallace’s words resonate with me because he is calling for the members of our community to act like professionals. We have made large investments in our farms and businesses, but there are scofflaws and pirates among us whose behavior puts all that work at risk. It doesn’t matter that 90 percent of the industry is doing everything right if a few bad apples abuse their product, causing illnesses and forcing regulators to crack down, or leading to consumers shunning our product.

A few farmers making a mess in front of affluent homeowners will quickly turn potential allies into powerful opponents. If we tolerate these individuals in our community and choose to look the other way when fellow growers skirt the law, we shouldn’t be surprised when regulators crack down and make our lives miserable.

This issue of the newsletter examines professionalism in shellfish farming around the world. Mike Oesterling and Tom Gallivan discuss how responsible growers in Virginia are working with regulators in an atmosphere of mutual respect to develop workable regulations that help preserve the industry. ECSGA President Mike Peirson expands on this theme of the need for professionalism to ensure a prosperous future for shellfish aquaculture. Finally, a wrap-up of the World Oyster Congress held in Arcachon, France offers a chance to gain some perspective on our own industry by examining the practices of growers from other countries.
The Shellfish Growers of Virginia (SGV) is an association representing farmers of hard clams (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) and oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Last year Virginia shellfish aquaculture (including seed) amounted to almost $40 million, dockside value. With its mission of striving for the advancement, expansion and well-being of the shellfish aquaculture industry of Virginia, one of our primary objectives is to advocate for just and workable laws and regulations.

Two state agencies exercise regulatory control over shellfish aquaculture in the commonwealth: the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) and the Virginia Department of Health, Division of Shellfish Sanitation (VDH-DSS). VMRC has control of natural resources management, including the leasing of growing grounds, permitting and reporting requirements. VDH-DSS oversees the public health aspects of shellfish aquaculture, from the classification of growing grounds to shellfish handling. VMRC and VDH-DSS work cooperatively in developing rules and regulations. Virginia is very fortunate that these two agencies take their responsibilities seriously, and have included shellfish farmers in regulatory deliberations. In this respect, producers and regulators work together in a cooperative manner to develop regulations that meet the objectives of the agency, while still being workable for industry.

Virginia needs to be vigilant against any adverse public health impacts resulting from the consumption of raw shellfish. Two of the pathogens challenging growers coast-wide are the naturally-occurring bacteria *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (V.p.) and *Vibrio vulnificus* (V.v.). Virginia must implement *Vibrio* control plans to reduce the risks of these pathogens for raw shellfish consumption and to provide guidance to industry on how to handle shellfish in order to minimize pathogen growth during and after harvest.

In 2010, in a proactive mode, VDH-DSS developed a control plan for V.p. Instead of just promulgating new regulations, they invited both wild-harvest and cultured-shellfish industry leaders to meet to discuss proposed strategies. Various options were proposed and discussed with a critical eye towards the impact that implementation would have on industry, while still achieving the desired public health protection. These were definitely give-and-take discussions.

Ultimately, regulations were promulgated through the VMRC. After the first year of implementation, VDH-DSS and VMRC again convened industry representatives to assess the efficacy of the regulations and to “tweak” the rules. Again, with industry concurrence, modified regulations were promulgated. Unfortunately, earlier this year a second V.v. case (still contested) was attributed to oysters harvested from Virginia, and necessitated the amending of Virginia’s *Vibrio* Control Plan to include V.v. controls.

Again, VDH-DSS did not develop this plan internally, but held public workshops to explain their plan of action and to solicit industry input on the ability of industry to work profitably under amended regulations. Already having a V.p. plan in place and having seen it “work,” made the process for developing a V.v. control plan less of a mystery for industry. The fact that VDH-DSS was willing to listen to industry concerns over the impacts to their businesses and eventually modified regulations to address those concerns, has made the relationship between industry and regulators cooperative rather than adversarial.

Since the major expansion of shellfish aquaculture began in the 1980s, Virginia’s industry and its regulatory agencies have worked hand-in-hand to help expand the industry, while providing a framework for regulatory control and public safety. Virginia regulatory agencies are definitely aquaculture friendly (which certainly beats the alternative).

Thanks to Julie Henderson, Plant Program Manager, VDH-DSS for critical review of this article.
Frankly, dealing with *Vibrio* harvest regulations is an expensive pain in the ass. No one in this industry likes to be told what to do and few of us can afford to incur additional expenses. Here in Virginia we have been selling millions of shellfish year-round by modifying our harvest methods, keeping things cool and communicating with our regulators as to what is feasible and what would put us out of business. It has not been an easy path, but we are safely producing millions of servings of shellfish and making money in the process.

The scale of the Virginia industry helps us to meet some requirements. Many of us are full-time aquaculturists, and some of the companies are large and can absorb the necessary equipment. However, we are also smaller operations who build our own coolers, drive used reefer trucks, and use every ounce of creativity to meet the regulations while spending the least amount of money. Our hands have been forced by regulation; those who do not have land-based, walk-in coolers or reefer trucks with electric standby cannot tag shellfish in the warmer months unless they sell to someone who has this equipment.

I am not happy about buying GPS sticks, refrigerated trucks, and cooler inspections. However, I realize that to continue to harvest in warmer months and to ensure the highest level of food safety this is what I need. Having made this investment, I also realize that we need to make sure everyone in the industry is following the same rules because the FDA looks at us as a state: if someone skirts the regulations and causes an illness, the entire state will suffer the consequences.

I am not “dropping dimes,” but I have certainly told people to cover up their oysters or clams and get them to a cooler by the regulated time. If they get someone sick we all get shut down – me, my family, my crew and all their families. I guess you could say we “self police” to some degree. Not speaking up and confronting someone who is “heat abusing” shellfish in your growing area or anywhere is endangering your income.

Finally, keep in mind that the FDA looks at us as a national industry; it seems they are hell-bent on post-harvest treatment or on simply shutting down domestic family farms, while allowing unsafe frozen imports to come in lightly inspected. We all need to provide safe shellfish nationwide. This industry of independently minded individuals is in this fight together, and while I still embrace each of us sailing alone, we need to start anchoring together.
While the government sometimes seems to be barely functional these days, it doesn’t stop it from increasingly inserting itself into our lives and businesses. As shellfish aquaculturists, our most recent concern stems from regulations to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of illnesses resulting from the consumption of oysters and clams harboring Vibrio bacteria.

The modifications that we must make to our operations run the gamut from sensible, to inconvenient, to expensive, to impractical. Even though these mandates originate from the federal government through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the states have generally determined the specific measures necessary for your business to comply.

As my fellow Virginians Mike Oesterling and Tom Gallivan point out elsewhere in this issue (see pages 2 and 3), the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Virginia Shellfish Sanitation Division of the Health Department determine what shellfish harvesters must do to meet the goal of reducing or eliminating illnesses. While Virginia growers might not always agree with these state decisions, we have always had input into the formation of the regulations. I believe that this cooperation between state regulators and the shellfish industry was one of the primary drivers in making Virginia one of the largest producers of littleneck clams in the nation and a major oyster producer.

Our neighboring states of North Carolina and Maryland, while generally sharing our climate and water resources, have up to now not shared our production success. Our long history of aquaculture, coupled with our ability to work with our state agencies, has made a difference.

The lesson from this is to make every effort to work with your state agencies and educate them on what you do in your operation so that they can take those procedures into account when formulating regulations. Remember that most of these regulations are to protect public health. Failure of the regulations to accomplish that goal can lead to failure of your business if the public isn’t confident in the safety of your product. An example of this cooperation of regulators and industry occurred in 1989 when New England boycotted Maryland soft clams due to high bacteria counts in the summer. The soft-clam harvesters actually went to the regulators to find a regulatory solution to the problem, resulting in the icing or refrigeration of product on board harvesting vessels, which re-opened the New England market.

Regulation can also be applied to your grow-out operations. Since we operate on public, subaqueous grounds, we are subject to regulation from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, our state marine or natural resources commission and, in some cases, local zoning. When I started in the business in 1983, clam aquaculture was relatively new and grow-out methods were still being developed.

As we tried new methods, we weren’t really in compliance with leasing rules dating back 100 years for oyster shell planting. Again, our Virginia Marine Resources Commission worked with us to modernize the rules to allow leeway in our planting methods while still protecting public access to the waterways.

The best way to protect yourself from greater regulation in your field work is to make as small a disruption in your area as possible. Too many floats or poles or discarded gear will attract the attention of your neighbors and, ultimately, the regulators. The ECSGA has a Best Management Practices (BMP) manual available on its website (as do most state aquaculture associations). Adhere to these BMPs and make sure others do, too.

Discarded nets or other gear will get everyone in trouble, regardless of who the offending party...
What Is the Best Size For a Shellfish Farm?

by Bob Rheault

Talking with growers in Australia and New Zealand I am often struck by the scale of their operations and the size of their companies. On the East Coast our industry is dominated by small firms. I estimate that we have about a thousand farms from Maine to Florida, but I can only identify about a dozen with more than 10 employees. In many states the size of the farm is dictated by the lease size. In Florida and many Massachusetts towns, leases are two or three acres in size with only a few exceptions. In Rhode Island, the shellfishermen have been trying to cap our lease size for decades. I have been pushing back against this type of social engineering because I feel it predefines the nature of the industry and limits opportunities for growth. It is an interesting argument with valid points on each side. I thought I would take a moment to look at the ramifications of lease size on the development of our industry.

If you look at shellfish farmers in France, Australia or New Zealand (or even the large firms in the U.S.) you will see lots of mechanization: optical oyster sorters, knuckleboom cranes and shiny aluminum harvest boats. Some of this mechanization is made possible by the scale of their operations, but where farm sizes are small growers team up to form cooperatives so they can share the expense of these investments. Mechanization allows farmers to produce 50 tons per person per year, which is important since their per-piece price is pretty low. Our small-scale growers can’t afford these tools, so we do these tasks manually and our productivity per person is much lower. (What is your per-person annual production?)

If your industry is composed of “mom-and-pop” growers who cannot afford to invest in mechanization, it is also going to be challenged when regulators start mandating onboard refrigeration, HACCP-certified processing facilities and reefer trucks. “Mom-and-pops” are resigned to a lifetime of backbreaking manual labor, and they have little resil-
Drakes Bay Update
by Bob Rheault

If you have not been following the ECSGA Listserv or national news outlets, you might not have heard about the National Park Service’s (NPS) four-year crusade to exterminate the Drakes Bay Oyster Company (DBOC) from the Drakes Estero National Park outside San Francisco, Calif. The farm employs 30 people and has been producing as much as 40 percent of California’s oysters for about 70 years.

The DBOC’s 50-year Special Use Permit was set to expire at the end of November 2012, but the farm had been trying for years to get an extension. Unfortunately, the NPS contends that commercial activity is inconsistent with its definition of “wilderness,” and over the past four years has been slandering the farm with false allegations of environmental harm. The contentious debate drew the attention of Congress, with repeated investigations finding little evidence of significant harm. Nonetheless, the NPS continues to state that the farm interferes with seals, creates unacceptable levels of noise, damages eelgrass and spreads exotic species.

After the NPS published a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in May that was rife with errors, dozens of shellfish scientists submitted hundreds of pages to refute the worst of the claims. For instance, the data used to demonstrate noise impacts was found to have been extrapolated from New Jersey jet-ski recordings. This summer it was revealed that the NPS had deployed hidden cameras that filmed the farm every minute for over two years, yet failed to show one instance of seal disturbance. The Marine Mammal Commission was brought in to independently review the NPS seal data, and concluded that “the data supporting the above analyses are scant and have been stretched to their limit.”

Just before Thanksgiving the NPS released the final 1000-page EIS, which failed to address any of our comments on the flawed science. At the end of November U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced that he would not renew the DBOC Special Use Permit.

— Continued on page 7
Permit, leaving the farm 90 days to clean up and pull out without any financial recompense.

On Nov. 29, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported:

Kevin Lunny, a local rancher who bought the shellfish operation from Johnson Oyster Co. in 2004, said he was shocked when he got a call directly from Salazar on Thursday morning telling him that the 40-year occupancy agreement would not be renewed.

“It’s disbelief and excruciating sorrow,” he said of the mood at the oyster farm, where 30 people are employed, including seven families that live on the property.

“There are 30 people, all in tears this morning, who are going to lose their jobs and their homes,” Lunny said. “They are experts in seafood handling and processing in the last oyster cannery in California, and there is nowhere for them to go.”

Shortly after the decision was announced, the government watchdog group, Cause of Action, filed suit alleging a laundry list of violations and asking for an injunction until the legal matters can be decided.

As an industry association, our main concern is to ensure that the NPS’s false claims of environmental damage are retracted. These spurious claims will be used against our industry in lease applications for years to come. The decision whether to allow the farm to coexist in the park is a policy question. We can’t allow our industry to be thrown under the bus to achieve policy objectives. I am hoping our elected officials in Washington, DC will step up to ensure that justice is served, scientific integrity is maintained and government officials are held accountable.

---

**Upcoming Events in 2013**

**East Coast Commercial Fishermen’s & Aquaculture Trade Exposition.** Jan. 18-20. Ocean City Convention Center, Ocean City, MD. Contact (800) 421-9176 or visit [marylandwatermen.com](http://marylandwatermen.com).


**Aquaculture America 2013.** Feb. 21-25. Nashville, TN. Contact (760) 751-5005 or visit [www.was.org](http://www.was.org).

**International Boston Seafood Show/Seafood Processing America.** March 10-12. Boston, MA. Contact (207) 842-5504 or visit [www.bostonseafood.com](http://www.bostonseafood.com).

William & Mary Aquaculture Conference Williamsberg Va

Growout Bags in our warehouse both square and diamond mesh, open or sealed end with the closures of your choice.

Select your sizes from 2mm thru 23mm

PVC Slide Sealer
Ketcham’s is your source for the time tested

Proven profits for growers in the real world

OysterGro™ the complete farming system

You can get it complete or as a kit to suit your personal growing needs

Large easily removable caps on each end.
The cage accommodates six Vexar oyster bags on two levels.
Polyethylene main and secondary rope lines make mechanized handling feasible.

Drawer design makes access and handling fast and easy.

Two airtight floats specifically designed to reach optimum buoyancy for feeding depth.
Housing constructed of 8 gauge galvanized vinyl clad marine grade mesh for years of service.

Shelf separates top and bottom bags for more flow more grow more dough.

Secure anchoring system provides stability in all types of weather conditions.
Door allows easy access to oyster bags.

Put your oysters at the top of the water column for more flow, grow & dough

Fabrication Tools in Stock

Variable speed tumbler in stock with stainless motor has concentric sorting tubes, UHMW rollers. Simple rugged and over ten years of reliable at sea service. Can be set up with Hydraulic drive in lieu of electric motor

Grow trays stackable to your design available in mesh sizes of one, half and now the new three quarter inch mesh sizes, more innovation from Ketcham’s for you the pro oyster grower

Racks for grow-out bags. This big one is a 2 X 7 holding 14 bags built for deep sites on Martha’s Vineyard. This is the 8 gauge 4.5” oyster mesh. Finished or as kits. Custom designed from 3 to 20 bags configured to comply with the regs that may apply to your grant

Cordage by the foot, coil or pallet

Ketcham Supply Corp 111 Myrtle Street
New Bedford, Mass 02740 508 997 4787
www.Lobstering.com Fax 508 992 5220
Welcome, New Member: 
R. Murphy Knives

Murphy “Stay Sharp” knives are the result of more than 162 years of knife-manufacturing experience. Since 1850, the company has produced cutlery for professionals in almost every field. The finest steels are carefully developed into blades that are accurately hardened and tempered, precision ground, polished and hand-honed.

Professionals and home shuckers alike appreciate the quality and workmanship built into each knife, as well as the wide variety of blade styles designed for different shell forms.

America’s Test Kitchen chose Murphy’s New Haven oyster knife as the best of six oyster knives they tested (read about it in the June 2012 issue of Cook’s Illustrated magazine).

Features
- hand-crafted manufacturing process
- continuing innovations like the Duxbury oyster knife, developed for Island Creek Oysters and popular among oyster farms
- largest variety of shellfish knife styles available in the U.S.
- wooden handles come in a variety of shapes
- commercial grade blades with plastic handles available for several oyster knives

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.

Fish Farming News is published bi-monthly. Subscriptions are just $14.95 per year in the US.

Paid subscribers also receive The Fish Farmers Phone Book/Directory, published annually.

To subscribe, call (800) 989-5253 or e-mail <jccarter@fish-news.com>.
Hurricane Sandy Hits New Jersey Shellfish Hatcheries Hard

by Gef Flimlin, Rutgers Cooperative Extension

Welcome to the “New” Jersey Shore. It certainly isn’t what it was just a few weeks ago. It has been devastated by Hurricane Sandy, which took a strange left turn off the coast and whacked New Jersey and Long Island, and turned New York City into a flooded mess.

Ocean and Monmouth Counties in N.J. were especially hard hit. Although many other areas of the state lost electric power (some for up to two weeks), the coastal barrier islands and the Raritan Bay bayshore suffered severe flooding, as well as intense destruction of homes and businesses. It is not uncommon to see homes totally moved from their foundations and lying either in a lagoon or in someone else’s yard. Piles of water-logged sheetrock, insulation, appliances and home furnishings are piled high along coastal streets.

Two well-established shellfish hatcheries on the western side of Barnegat Bay were especially hard hit. Five hatchery/nursery systems on the back-side of Absecon Island (Atlantic City/Brigantine) had some flooding and electrical issues, but no structural damage.

The Bayfarm Hatchery in West Creek, and the hatchery formerly known as Biosphere, now rented by two culturists, were total losses. John Schriever, who owns Bayfarm, had his hatchery at ground level in a building raised up about 10 feet with living quarters above it. The edge of the property was lined with raceways and some upwellers. Since it faced northeast there was a huge fetch that sent crashing waves into the structure, blowing out the walls and making the facility a total loss. Bayfarm has a nursery system at another site, which also suffered damage, but not as severe as expected. It sits at a marina that the Schriever’s own, and it was very badly damaged.

The “Bio-sphere” facility, which has been in operation since about 1982, sits at the end of Green Street in Tuckerton. Green Street was historically the heart of the clam industry in town, but now there are only two clam houses left, one owned by the Parsons family for over 100 years. The Biosphere property was the training ground for three other current hatchery operators who moved on from that company, and have done very well over the years. The facility is a converted Evangelical church raised up about four feet off the ground sitting on the beach of Little Egg Harbor Bay at the southwest end of Barnegat Bay. It was surrounded on two sides by 15 upweller boxes, 100 30-ft raceways that were stacked four high with a sluice box on top to distribute bay water. That water was pumped from a pump house sitting on a dock about 50 feet out into the bay.

All that is left now is the building structure, but many of the walls were blown out. Everything else that was on the ground was washed into the large marsh behind the facility, including two 20-ft shipping containers. It looks as if a huge broom simply cleared the land of everything there. Nothing remains except the building, which is in terrible condition.

One very interesting offer to help rebuild has come from some Amish farmers from Lancaster County, Penn., who offered to come over for a couple of days and do a “barn raising” to rebuild the hatchery buildings. The director of the University of Maryland oyster hatchery in Cambridge, Md., has also offered to bring some folks up to

— Continued on page 13
Please make plans to join us on our annual trip to Washington, DC to educate our elected representatives about our issues. Every year we join with our compatriots from the left coast and the Gulf for a week of meetings and receptions. This year we will be heading off to our nation's capital in the last week of January.

Experience has shown that we are most effective when we can bring constituents from each state in the association. If I just walk into a congressional office representing the ECSGA I am likely to get passed off to a junior staffer, but when I'm accompanied by a voting constituent we are greeted by senior staff or the actual representative. If you don't have someone joining us in DC from your state then we are missing out on a great opportunity. Even if you can only join us for a day or two, it is important that you (or someone from your state) make the trip. If you personally cannot afford the time, please ask around and see if there is someone else in our industry from your state who might be able to go.

We typically try to meet with about 20 Congressional representatives and a dozen senators, and we try to schedule meetings with the various agencies (NOAA, USDA, FDA, etc.) to discuss key regulatory issues. Together the three associations will host a massive reception Wednesday night, Jan. 30, at the Acadiana Restaurant, starring chefs from New Orleans and DC, and featuring shellfish from all three coasts. In addition, we usually host a Wine and Oyster event for the Congressional Shellfish Caucus members.

With such a packed and exhausting schedule we need your participation to make it work. If you think you might be able to attend please give me a call and I will get you all the specifics. Last year Cindy West brought her 17-year-old daughter along for the best civics lesson of her life. Now it's your turn to step up.
Hurricane Sandy

help with some reconstruction of the hatchery insides.

Clam growers themselves seemed to have made out fairly well in their field plots. Since there was a lot of water in the bays, when the wind and waves came it was deep enough in most of the major growing areas that there haven’t been many reports of severe damage to the clam plots.

Oyster growers on the Delaware Bay side of N.J. were not impacted too badly since it lies on the leeside of the Jersey Cape. Most of that industry uses a rack-and-bag system, so damage was not heavy.

The Barnegat Bay Shellfish Restoration Program had a couple of upweller boxes that took a swim, but have been recovered. A couple of their Giant Clams from the Clam Trail floated away from their original spots, one moving five blocks along Long Beach Island Blvd. There is still one giant clam on the lam, and it is thought it might be hiding in the bay.

It is going to take some time to get the hatcheries back into full-production mode and it is very unlikely that those specific facilities will be functioning for 2013, but never say never.

Editor’s Note:
Growers in Long Island Sound sustained heavy damage to bottom-planted oysters for the third year in a row, and a few boats were lost, but structural damage to shoreside facilities was minimal.

It may take years for the insurance and FEMA disaster-relief efforts to get sorted out. On the bright side, Sandy did spark renewed discussion about crop insurance and disaster relief for shellfish farmers. Tessa Getchis and Bob Rheault had been negotiating with the FDA to try to expand the Farm Service Agency’s NAP coverage to include bottom planted oysters, and it now looks as if those discussions may have borne fruit in time for the enrollment period next fall.
Reflections on the 2012 Oyster World Congress

by Bob Rheault

Recently I had the honor of being invited to speak at the Oyster World Congress in Arcachon, France. Oyster experts from more than 20 countries gathered there to discuss a wide range of topics, from governance and management to disease and culture methods. The seaside town of Arcachon lies along the southwestern edge of the Bay of Arcachon, one of the larger oyster producing bays in France, accounting for around eight percent of the country’s oyster production. The six-mile wide, triangular bay has tidal height differences ranging from six to nine feet, and supports 350 family farms of between one and 20 acres in size.

In recent years, French oyster production has suffered immensely, dropping from 180,000 tons a year to about half that amount due to mass mortalities caused by the oyster herpes virus. Killing as much as 80 percent of French seed oysters in each of the past four years, this virus has afflicted *Crassostrea gigas* in many growing areas around the globe, usually killing larvae or seed, and sometimes adults. *Gigas* (the Pacific or Japanese oyster) represents 96 percent of world oyster production over four continents and in dozens of countries, so the virus is the subject of huge research programs around the world.

In New Zealand, where herpes virus hit particularly hard in 2011, the industry-funded Cawthron Institute started trials to evaluate 1850 families of *gigas* in an effort to find resistant lines. The sheer magnitude of this effort and similar work in the French Research Institute for Exploration of the Sea (IFREMER) is noteworthy.

While oyster production in France is very impressive, I have to wonder if the industry there might not be its own worst enemy. In their zeal to increase production it is apparent that growers routinely exceed the carrying capacity of their bays, stressing the oysters and making them more susceptible to disease. In their fervor to keep production up they seem willing to move seed around everywhere, spreading the herpes virus far and wide, even to other countries in the EU.

While concerns about oyster herpes virus dominated much of the congress, there were sessions on many other issues as well. Any time you get to see what is going on in other countries you cannot help but learn a few things and gain some perspective about your own industry. A couple of universal truths are worthy of note:

1. Oysters are not rocks. They are live animals and if you stress them enough they may get sick and die.
2. If you have a selective breeding program targeting only one trait such as growth, you may find that traits such as disease resistance suffer as a result.
3. The French have really good food and wine.
4. If you move oysters around without proper biosecurity protocols you will spread diseases with them.
5. Multiple-use conflicts are universal and growers need to be mindful that it is a privilege to work in the commons. Abuse that privilege at your peril.
6. Selfish individuals will do stupid things for personal profit that can do tremendous damage to the entire industry – and we need to prevent that to the maximum extent possible.

— Continued on page 15
While we often complain of a rigid regulatory bureaucracy here in the U.S., we have it easy compared to the French. Mandatory training is a prerequisite to leaseholding, and in some growing areas lease size is tied to the number of employees you have. The upside to this is that growers are referred to as “professionals” and are all members of the producer association. This means that the association can afford to hire staff and is very effective in its lobbying efforts.

The mayor of Arcachon spoke at the conference, marveling at the disproportionate influence wielded by a mere 350 producers in the Aquitaine Region, with a population of millions. The producer association easily thwarts efforts by affluent waterfront homeowners who would prefer not to have farmers working in front of their multi-million-Euro vacation homes. The government subsidizes many aspects of farming and also supports large research and genetics programs at IFREMER, the national research and regulatory organization.

Concerns about the equivalency of the EU and U.S. shellfish sanitation programs have blocked international trade for over two years, and there was some discussion of the EU import ban on shellfish from the U.S. at the congress. An EU health regulator suggested that the problem lies with the FDA’s inaction and inability to monitor and regulate algal toxins. I spoke up and pointed out that we have no problems with algal toxin monitoring, and stated that the issue is primarily political. A number of French buyers met with me following the session to discuss a way forward. I told them that French producers and dealers need to pressure their regulators to negotiate in good faith so we can break the impasse. As I write this, EU regulators are meeting with the FDA in Washington, DC to discuss this issue. I hope they are feeling the pressure to be less intransigent.

A 400-year tradition of oyster farming and a powerful growers’ association ensures that growers can stand up to affluent waterfront homeowners in Arcachon Bay.
In This Issue

Mouth of the Bay: *A Call for Professionalism* ...................... page 1
Va. Growers: A Grower’s Perspective ............................... page 3
From the President: *Working With Regulators* ................... pages 4, 7
What’s the Best Size for a Shellfish Farm? ......................... page 5
Drakes Bay Update ........................................................ pages 6, 7
Coming Events .................................................................. page 7
Welcome, New Member: R. Murphy Knives ....................... page 10
Hurricane Sandy Hits N.J. Hard ....................................... pages 11, 13
Walk on the Hill 2013 ....................................................... page 12
Reflections on the 2012 Oyster World Congress ............... pages 14, 15