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2014 Legislative Priorities

Shellfish aquaculture is the largest and fastest growing marine aquaculture sector in the United States. Shellfish farming epitomizes sustainable seafood because shellfish clean coastal waters as they feed. Despite challenging economic conditions, shellfish production has continued to grow, providing critical jobs and economic production in rural coastal areas hurt by declining wild-fisheries harvests. Resource managers understand that expanded production will yield green jobs, health benefits and environmental improvements. Yet shellfish farmers are challenged by a variety of issues:

1) EU trade embargo – In 2009 a trade dispute erupted between FDA regulators and their European Union counterparts. FDA inspectors disputed the long-standing equivalency of EU shellfish sanitation protocols, blocking the import of European products to the U.S. The EU retaliated by barring imports of U.S. shellfish, blocking our access to lucrative European markets.

- **Direct the FDA to audit pristine growing areas in Europe (as they agreed to do two years ago).**
- **Direct the FDA to approve areas for import to the U.S. with a reciprocal trade agreement.**
- **Encourage including shellfish in Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations to eliminate non-tariff, regulatory trade barriers with the EU.**

2) Restore specialty crop status for shellfish – Defining shellfish as “Specialty Crops” under the Farm Bill would allow growers to share in existing block grants to states to support critical research and marketing initiatives. This simple fix would not require any new spending and would not significantly alter the formula by which states share in these funds.

- **Support HR 1590 and S 754, The Shellfish Marketing Assistance Fairness Act**

3) FDA concerns about the safety of raw shellfish threaten crippling regulations – The shellfish community is challenged by illnesses related to naturally occurring bacteria called Vibrios. These bacteria are not related to sewage, but they can accumulate in shellfish when waters are warm. Since our product is often consumed raw, shellfish are implicated in several hundred illnesses each year.

In an effort to reduce illnesses the FDA has proposed crippling new regulations, but the science behind their proposals is weak because many unknowns about Vibrios remain. We need improved tools for rapid detection, tools to differentiate pathogenic from non-pathogenic strains, and treatment methods that allow us to sell safe, raw shellfish to consumers who demand this delicious, sustainable product.

- **Direct the FDA and CDC to fund additional research on Vibrios to refine their risk assessment models and develop improved rapid detection methods for virulent strains of Vibrios.**
- **Restore funding (\$1M) for education targeting at-risk consumers. FDA – ISSC (Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference).**

4) Restore funding for critical research needs – Shellfish aquaculture research is funded through a patchwork of USDA and NOAA programs. Farmed shellfish production has been growing, but funding for federal research has been declining for several years. Shellfish farming is dominated by thousands of independent, small farmers who are challenged to fund the critical research needs we face **in the fields of shellfish disease, food safety, climate change and other issues.**

NOAA Fisheries spends less than 1 percent of its annual budget on aquaculture research despite the facts that (1) half the seafood consumed in the U.S. is cultured (2) 90% of that farmed seafood is imported, and (3) the World Bank now projects a global need to double aquaculture production by 2030.

- **Support funding for NOAA aquaculture research, Sea Grant and the NOAA Shellfish Initiative.**

USDA Regional Aquaculture Centers have been level-funded for over two decades at half the authorized spending level. USDA NIFA has suffered huge cuts in competitive grant offerings.

- **Fully fund the USDA Regional Aquaculture Centers to the amount authorized.**

Ocean acidification threatens shellfish populations, but it is still unclear how this threat will manifest and what steps we can take to lessen these impacts. We are disappointed to see the FY14 NOAA OA line funded at only \$6 million when both the House and the Senate supported higher levels for this critical issue.

- **Support FY15 Integrated Ocean Acidification research at \$11.6 million, restoring the President’s FY12 level. (NOAA-IOOS)**
- **Support USDA-ARS shellfish breeding studies to develop lines of shellfish that tolerate acidic waters.**

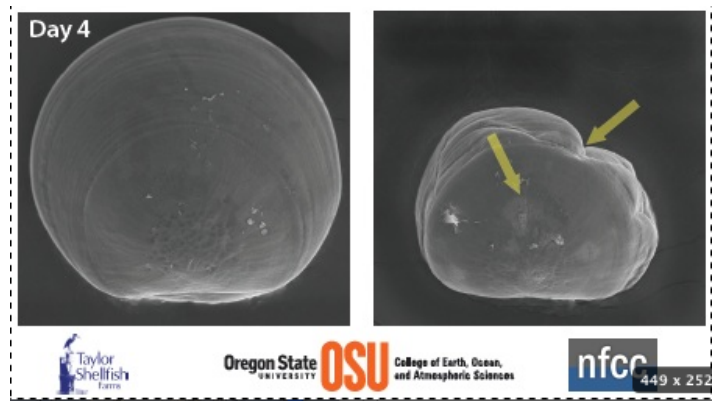


Image of 4-day-old oyster larvae grown in normal (left) and acidified waters

5) Clean Water Issues – Non-point source pollution from leaching septic systems and urban and agricultural runoff is a major source of nutrients in sensitive coastal waters. These nutrients can lead to algal blooms, fish kills and low-oxygen conditions. Excess nutrients are the major cause of degraded rivers and coastal waters. Limiting fertilizer runoff and upgrading sewage treatment plants in our nation’s estuaries creates and protects critical jobs and shellfish growing areas.

NOAA recently announced new *Aquaculture Policy* and *Shellfish Initiative* that advance research and restoration of shellfish in our coastal waters. Unfortunately no funds were attached.

Shellfish improve water quality and remove many tons of nitrogen from sensitive coastal waters annually. Unfortunately, the CWA and EPA regulations do not allow for “in-stream treatment,” which would allow nutrient-credit trading and provide incentives to expand shellfish aquaculture.

- **Support nutrient-credit trading and in-stream treatment. (EPA)**
- **Expand NOAA’s Shellfish Initiative, and continue to support the Chesapeake Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act, the Long Island Sound Restoration and Stewardship Act, and the EPA’s Clean Water State Revolving Fund.**