

EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSOCIATION



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.

1623 Whitesville Rd.
Toms River, NJ 08755
www.ecsga.org

Executive Director
Bob Rheault
(401) 783-3360
bob@ecsga.org

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The Mouth of the Bay Our Industry is Maturing



Executive Director
Bob Rheault

Those of us who have been in this industry for the long haul have borne witness to a remarkable evolution. For intensive growers the invention of plastics was big. Vinyl-coated wire and extruded mesh made growing shellfish much easier than it was in the early days, when we were essentially running field experiments on feeding crabs. More recently we have seen the introduction of exciting new tools like the OysterGro system,

SEAPA baskets and now the Hex-cyl cages (story on page 6).

We have also seen the industry grow and mature. About a decade ago we conducted an industry survey and discovered that 80 percent of shellfish farms had fewer than five employees, and most farmers had just a few years of experience. Back then you could count on two hands the number of farms with more than 10 employees.

If we were to repeat that survey today, I know we would find dozens of farms with significant payrolls, with many headed by grizzled and battle-scarred veterans.

The ECSGA has matured as well. When we started the association in 2004 we were neophytes in the political arena, operating on a shoestring budget, led by a half-time director and a cadre of committed volunteers. We learned how to make ourselves heard in

D.C. and developed a reputation for holding excellent receptions and forging strong ties with key representatives.

We came tantalizingly close to achieving some remarkable feats. In 2010 we had a \$3-million-a-year USDA Shellfish Breeding Center fall apart when Congress failed to pass a budget. In 2013 we came up four votes short on a Farm Bill Amendment that would have granted us specialty-crop status.

Today we still run a lean ship, but now we have a real budget that allows us to weigh in on important legal issues and to hire a professional lobbyist, Matt Mullin, to help us in D.C. (story below) I was deeply gratified to see our members step up to help fund that effort, and I remain optimistic that the investment will pay off and that our association will be able to provide better value for the hard-working members we serve.

ECSGA Is Stepping Up to Improve Your Bottom Line

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

I know you're busy, but this is important.

For over a decade we have been organizing annual trips to D.C. to educate our elected representatives about the issues that impact our community. Our allies in Congress have told us we're doing a good job, but if we want to be really effective we need to make ourselves seen more than just once a year. Congressional staffers are swamped with requests, and it's crucial that we keep pushing to get our issues back to the top of the pile or they will simply get buried.

This year the ECSGA board decided to hire professional lobbyist Matt Mullin of High Street Strategies to help us advance several issues on our legislative priority list. Matt loves our industry and is eager to help us get legislation passed this year to address our top issues. He has many years of experience working with watermen and NGOs in the Chesapeake Bay region under his belt.

Here are the top issues:

1. *Clarify language to exempt shellfish farmers working in state waters from the requirements of the Jones Act.*

Although growers in different states are impacted by the Jones Act differently, many of our members report that Jones Act seamen's insurance is outrageously expensive. We believe that our employees are better covered under standard workers' compensation policies. Growers should not be forced to pay more simply because a 55-year-old statute designed to protect mariners on the high seas can be interpreted to apply to aquaculture employees working in inshore waters in certain states. We are optimistic that we can pass clarifying language that exempts shellfish farmers operating in state waters.

2. *Define farmed shellfish as specialty crops under the Farm Bill.*

In 2013 we came up four votes short of attaining specialty-crop status. By including other aquaculture crops in addition to shellfish, we have high hopes that we will garner the support needed to get it done in the 2018 Farm Bill. This revenue-neutral change to the



WWW.EDF.ORG

The ECSGA has hired professional lobbyist Matt Mullin to keep our top issues on the front burner with members of Congress.

specialty-crop definition should bring us better crop insurance as well as access to small, state block grants for marketing and research. The promise of effective and workable crop insurance makes this a very worthy goal!

3. *Resolve the European Union trade embargo.*

Matt has some ideas about how we can apply congressional pressure on the FDA to finally act on the EU trade issue. The FDA has been dragging their heels on this for far too long.

— Continued on page 13

Milford Oyster Festival Set for Friday and Saturday, August 18-19

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

It's that time of year again! Planning is already underway for the 43rd annual Milford Oyster Festival on Friday and Saturday, Aug. 18-19, when we hope to serve more than 45,000 oysters and clams to an eager crowd.

The festival is our biggest fund-raising effort of the year, with the proceeds fueling almost 40 percent of our annual operating expenses, but we can't pull this off without the help of about 100 volunteers. We work hard, but we also have a lot of fun, which is why we have a dedicated crew that comes back

year after year. We have jobs for all levels of ability, so even if you cannot commit to a full day, we would really appreciate any time you can give us.

The festival is also a great opportunity to connect with other growers, gear suppliers and scientists from the Milford Lab. We have a great team of about 25 paid professional shuckers who come from up and down the coast to compete for \$1,750 in prize money. If you know someone who is handy with an oyster knife, we are always looking for new entrants.

If anyone needs a room for the night, let us know, as we have reserved a block of inexpensive rooms at a local hotel. If you



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The shucking contest is always a horse race. Last year we had 28 professional shuckers come from as far away as Toronto and New Orleans and everywhere in between, and 19 of them competed. Only 11 seconds separated first place from third place. Shuckers are judged on speed and presentation. Points are deducted for not placing the oyster on the shell properly; presenting an oyster on a broken shell, or with grit, blood or another foreign substance on the flesh; a cut oyster; an oyster not completely severed from its shell.

would prefer to come by train to avoid the parking hassles, the Milford Metro North train station is only two blocks from our tent!

At our large booth located in the food court area we serve raw and cooked shellfish on Saturday. Across the harbor at Lisman Landing, we have raw-bar and chowder offerings at the pre-festival "Oyster Eve" on Friday evening and again all day Saturday. And of course, we organize the now-famous Oyster Shucking Contest, inviting some of the world's fastest shuckers to compete for bragging rights and those ever-popular cash prizes.

The festival will be held, rain or shine, Friday, Aug. 18, 6-9:30 p.m.; and Saturday, Aug. 19, 10

a.m. to 6 p.m. Beer, wine, oysters and other great food will be available both days. Admission to the festival is free, with the band Blackberry Smoke headlining at the festival main stage on Saturday. There is plenty to do for everyone, with children's entertainment, an antique car show, 200 arts-and-crafts vendors, amusement rides, schooner cruises, and a canoe and kayak race.

Hope to see you there!

For more information visit www.milfordoysterfestival.com

If you can help out for any part of the festival, please contact Trisha Kosloski, (203) 804-4263 or trisha.kozloski@yahoo.com



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Expensive Rookie Mistakes You'll Want to Avoid

by Robert Rheault,
ECSGA Executive Director

Recently I was talking to a grower who had been in the business for 15 years, but had just made a common rookie mistake. He had received a shipment of 2 million, 1-mm seed and he placed a portion of them into 1-mm spat bags. When he noticed that many were "escaping," he assumed that the hatchery had shipped a smaller size and called to ask for my advice. My first question was whether the hatchery had sold him seed that was 1 mm in length or seed that had been retained on 1-mm mesh.

I reminded him that 1-mm mesh actually has an opening that measures 1.4-mm on the diagonal. To retain seed that are 1 mm in length you need to use mesh that is 0.6 mm (600um) or smaller! This is true if you are talking about upwellers, spat bags or larger mesh bags.

Hatcheries sell seed that is measured in several different ways, so you need to know what you are getting to avoid repeating this costly mistake. Some hatcheries sell seed that is measured by length — typically the longest axis. For an oyster, the width is about 2/3 the length, so a 3-mm long oyster will be about 2 mm wide; you need to put it on 1.5-mm mesh "pet screen" if you want to avoid losses.

Some hatcheries sell seed that is retained on a certain mesh size — pretty self-explanatory.



MOOK SEA FARMS

Hatcheries sell seed that is measured in different ways, so you need to know exactly what you're getting to avoid making an expensive mistake. Seed sold as 1 mm in size is very different from seed that is retained on 1-mm mesh.

Often this is referred to as R-1 or 1-R for seed retained on 1-mm mesh. I would still recommend putting this seed on mesh that is less than 1 mm, just to be on the safe side.

The same holds true if you are talking about larger seed. If you have oyster seed that measures 1/2" in length, you cannot put it into a 1/2"-mesh bag! Especially with oysters, you need to focus on the sieve size that you are sorting on — not the length! And even if you are sieving on 1/2" mesh you should not put those oysters directly into 1/2"-mesh bags because

many will fall partway through the mesh. Then in a few weeks they will grow into the mesh of the bags and you will need to kill them to get them out. To avoid problems, I recommend using a sieve with an opening 1.5 times the mesh size of the bags you are going into.

This is one of the most common and most expensive mistakes I see new growers make. To avoid other common mistakes (and to save yourself cash and frustration) I recommend spending a few minutes checking out the PowerPoint presentation on Rookie Mistakes in the What's New box on the ECSGA home page. Or you can link to it directly here:

drive.google.com/file/d/0B2joK7eNYTUyaFlsWUILLRIRScVk



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Plastics: We Can't Live Without Them, but a Backlash is Brewing

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

Back in the April issue of this newsletter I wrote that I feared plastics could become the next battleground for our industry. That fear is becoming a reality faster than I ever thought possible. I recently spoke with a PhD candidate who was planning to do her thesis on the potential impacts of microplastics on shellfish and shellfish larvae. I told her that while I found her question interesting, I was really afraid of her results being taken out of context by the media. Whether her results reveal that microplastics are bad for shellfish, or are simply another inert particle in the water that shellfish have to deal with, I predict we will soon be reading articles in the news titled, “Yech, plastic in my shellfish.”

As plastic waste in the ocean gets more and more national attention, we have already seen aquaculture opponents using it as one more bludgeon in their arsenal, claiming that aquaculture adds to the plastic debris in the ocean. **We really need to stay ahead of this issue by making sure our gear is strapped in tight and that every grower takes the time to ensure that debris is not washing up on beaches.**

Microplastics and plastic debris represent two ends of the spectrum of sizes of plastic waste. Microplastics (under 2 mm) can be found in toothpaste and cosmetics, but also come from laundering fleece clothing and from the breakdown of larger pieces of plastic over long



CHRIS JORDAN
An albatross found dead on Midway Island with a stomach full of plastic debris. The chick's parents continued to feed it bits of plastic that they thought was food, and the baby bird starved to death.

periods of exposure to sun and mechanical abrasion. Particles of plastic greater than a few millimeters in size are considered marine plastic debris. Microplastics are believed to interfere with larval urchin feeding and survival, while larger debris has entangled and choked birds, turtles, fish and even whales.

According to a recent Ellen MacArthur Foundation report, *The New Plastics Economy*, the vast majority of plastic debris in the world's oceans comes from less-developed countries lacking in proper waste collection, disposal and recycling infrastructure. In nations where millions struggle just to survive and feed their families, people care less about where their trash ends up. An estimated 82 percent of the world's marine plastic debris comes from Asia, while less than 2 percent comes from the U.S.

and Europe. (www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics)

Of the 78 million metric tons of plastic produced annually, only 14 percent gets recycled, 14 percent is burned, 40 percent ends up in landfills and 32 percent winds up strewn about land or in the water. An estimated 8 million tons of plastic packaging and debris ends up in the oceans every year.

So what can we do? If the problem lies primarily in Asia, it would make sense to spend resources there in order to maximize our impact. However, the sense of outrage is coming mainly from the developed world, so even though we in the developed world are responsible for less than 2 percent of plastic waste, we will be expected to clean up our act as well.

As we work in the marine realm, **any marine debris that we generate will draw fire from environmental groups.** I maintain that as stewards of the waters we farm it is our responsibility to make sure our plastics don't get away. We can minimize the use of cable ties and other plastics that are prone to escaping. We can look for alternatives to plastics made from natural fibers and biodegradable materials. The fact remains that the invention of plastics (vinyl-coated wire, extruded-polystyrene mesh bags and injection-molded containers) is what has made the evolution of shellfish farming possible in the first place. **Perhaps the best we can do is participate in regular, visible and public beach clean-ups around the areas we farm.**

On a macro-level we can urge policy makers to phase out microplastic beads in cosmetics and toothpaste, and push industry to accelerate the development of compostable and degradable packaging solutions. Replacing styrofoam insulation used in packaging seafood is an especially vexing challenge. Eventually, the MacArthur Foundation report suggests, we will need to create financial incentives to increase recycling alternatives and to develop a sustainable, circular economy for plastics.

Meanwhile, the issue continues to gather steam and generate outrage. Fishermen and shellfish farmers, being visible workers on the water, are a prime target, but denial is not an effective strategy. We need to be seen as part of the solution and not part of the problem. I know that we regularly “harvested” buckets of other peoples’ trash from our lease every time we dragged a dredge. Let’s make sure everyone sees us as good neighbors in the commons. And brace yourself for that inevitable conversation when someone says to you, “Ewww, oysters. I won’t eat them because they have plastics in them.”





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ECSGA Membership Categories and Dues

Growers, dealers and equipment suppliers enjoy full voting rights. (If you are both a grower and a dealer simply ask yourself where most of your revenue comes from.) If you don't fall into one of these industry categories please consider joining as a non-voting associate member.

Member Type	Gross Annual Sales	Dues
Grower	\$0 to 50,000	\$100
Grower	\$50,000 to \$100,000	\$200
Grower	\$100,000 to 300,000	\$500
Grower	\$300,000 to 3 million	\$1,000
Grower	Over \$3 million	\$1,500
Shellfish Dealers and Equipment Suppliers		\$250
Restaurant Ally		\$100
Non-voting Associate		\$35

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— **“Barley” John Dunne**, Director, East Hampton Town Shellfish Hatchery, Montauk, NY

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Member Profile

Hoopers Island Now Offers Hexcyl System Shellfish Baskets

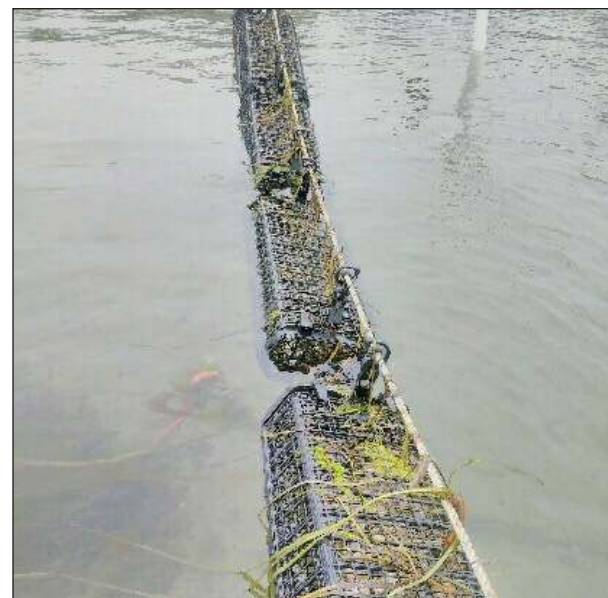
Hoopers Island Oyster Aquaculture Co. (HIOC) sells a wide variety of oyster-growing equipment, ranging from setting tanks to final grow-out gear. The newest addition to their product line is the Hexcyl Shellfish Aquaculture System, designed for adjustable longline shellfish farming and other tidal growing applications.

Hexcyl oyster baskets and products are designed to operate in a wide range of grow-out conditions and orientations, in low-, moderate- and high-energy environments. The plastic formula used in the Hexcyl system makes for a sleek basket that can handle the commercial farmer's rugged use day after day, and the Hexcyl company stands behind all their products with a five-year guarantee.

With so many different oyster-basket options on the market today, farmers must sort through different clips, doors, pivot pins and other additions and upgrades. Hoopers Island chose to sell the Hexcyl product line because the upgrades and modifications to the system are already included. The company has packed 25 years of knowledge in a 15-unit box, so farmers can

Features of Hexcyl Shellfish Baskets

- ❑ Oyster baskets come in all sizes required for shellfish growth: 3-, 5-, 10-, 15- and 20-mm mesh sizes;
- ❑ Patented Hexcyl pivot bank offers multiple attachment positions;
- ❑ Attach in linear orientation along the line;
- ❑ Attach across two lines approx 600 mm (24") to 750 mm (30") apart;
- ❑ Access doors at both ends of the basket;
- ❑ Positive locking "square axle" feature of the clip when attached to pivot bank;
- ❑ Locks when located in the upright operating position;
- ❑ Locks when folded down in the storage position for space efficiency;
- ❑ Fold-down clips for efficient transport of oyster baskets to and from the farm.



JAY FLEMING/HIOC

Hexcyl Shellfish Aquaculture Systems gear is built tough and guaranteed for five-years. It's ready to go right out of the box — doors, clips and body pieces are all included so you don't have to spend hours figuring out what you need to order.

upgrade their oyster leases without hours of researching which items to order. Everything you need comes in the box — doors, clips and body pieces.

The Hexcyl Pro-Series shellfish baskets earned design recognition at the 2017 Australian *Good Design* awards — the culmination of 10 years of design excellence. After an extensive evaluation process involving more than 35 Australian and international design experts, the jury picked only the top entries to receive the award, praising the Hexcyl system as, "a brilliant example of innovative design and engineering — this is about as good as it gets."

Hexcyl Systems debuted in 2006, 10 years or so after the adjustable-longline oyster-farming method was first invented by three pioneering oyster farmers from Cowell in South Australia: Ritchie Baker, Tony Shutz and Geoff Turner (BST Oysters). Pacific oyster growers

in many regions in South Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales were strong proponents of the adjustable longline system for growing hatchery-reared, single-seed oysters.

This new intertidal farming method gained immediate popularity down under because it yielded consistently high-quality oysters. In addition, the adjustable feature of the longlines enabled farmers for the first time to rapidly and efficiently raise and lower the growing heights of oysters throughout the year, providing an effective on-farm tool to manage shell growth, shell hygiene and meat condition of intertidally-farmed oysters.

Hoopers Island recently welcomed Sean Grizzell to their

— Continued on page 7



HOT AQUACULTURE NEWS!!



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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— Continued from page 6
Hexcyl Systems

expanded sales team. Sean is well-versed in many aspects of the adjustable longline system and has a great deal of experience with the various adaptations and uses. Sean, Chris Wyer and the entire Hoopers Island team can provide you with all the assistance you need for site evaluation, line orientation and infrastructure set-up.

Garry Seidl brings 25 years' worth of experience in adjustable long-



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line oyster farming to help you get the best results from this farming method. The requirements of intertidal oyster farming that will produce both continuity and consistency of high-quality oysters for the high-end, half-shell market are the same world over — only the environmental conditions, site



JAY FLEMING/HIOAC

Oyster baskets come in mesh sizes of 3, 5, 10, 15 and 20 mm to accommodate all stages of oyster grow-out.

locations and farming methods vary.

Most farmers are looking for help in planning where and how to set up and establish their farming infrastructure. The following information can help us help you with that task:

1. Google map of growing area showing location of proposed site;
2. description of seabed substrate (seagrass, firm sand, soft mud, rocks, etc.);
3. profile (flat, sloping, undulating, etc.);
4. depth of substrate;
5. minimum and maximum tidal range;
6. water flow rates across the

site (knots per second);

7. exposure to wind-generated wave energy (high/low/moderate) — is the site protected or exposed?
8. predominant wind directions (max/min wind strengths, if known); and
9. annual temperature range of water and air.

Farmers can achieve maximum growth using this information. The Hexcyl system is also perfect for plug-and-play applications. Some farmers set poles, line and the Hexcyl System and let Mother Nature take care of the rest!

Testimonials

"We have worked very closely with Sean Grizzell (Hoopers Island) integrating Hexcyl basket systems into our overall grow-out methods with very good results — other local farmers are now adapting Hexcyl baskets into their farms after seeing how they work on our farm."

—Harvey Cataldo, Bluff Hill Cove Oyster Farm

"When you work in an industry where almost everything hinges on the lifespan of your gear and quality of your equipment, you're very skeptical what you put on your farm. What separates

HIOAC from the pack is they were first farmers. Everything they put out is heavy duty and built to last. From Hexcyls, down-wellers to flupsies, tumblers to seed graders. If HIOAC puts their name on it, you can bet it's quality."

—Lane Zirlott, Murder Point Oysters



JAY FLEMING/HIOAC

Oyster baskets have doors on both ends for easy access.

"I've been dealing with HIOAC for the past two months. In that two months, Sean Grizzell has been to my farm twice and is always available when I call him. The sample baskets that HIOAC provided exceeded my expectations. The quality, durability, and price made my decision to outfit my new farm with Hexcyl gear a no-brainer. I've had nothing but positive remarks for HIOAC and especially Sean Grizzell."

—Hugh McClure, Point Aux Pins Oyster Farm

We Need Your Help!

Please lend a hand to help at the

Milford Oyster Festival

Friday—Saturday

Aug. 18–19, 2017

(cleanup on Sunday, Aug. 20)

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ISSC to Meet Oct. 14-19

by Robert Rheault,
ECSCA Executive Director

The Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) meets every other year to debate changes to the Model Ordinance and National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) Guide. This year the meeting will be held October 14-19 in Myrtle Beach, S.C. I like to refer to this biennial meeting as “The Superbowl of the shellfish world.” Most people would shudder at the prospect of arguing about regulating shellfish sanitation for six days, but I see this as an opportunity to fix some of the problems with the regulations that rule our businesses. It is incredibly important that this gets done right, since the placement of a comma or the use of the word “shall” vs. “should” can have a huge impact on how these rules impact your operation. This is your chance to speak up and let the regulators know what is working and what isn’t. The system is far from perfect, but at least we have a seat at the table and an opportunity to voice our concerns.

The ISSC has posted the proposals that will be reviewed and voted on at [www.issc.org/2017-](http://www.issc.org/2017-biennial-meeting)



[biennial-meeting](http://www.issc.org/2017-biennial-meeting). This year we will be debating 51 new proposals, along with 24 proposals from previous years that were sent back to committee for refinement. The goal of these tweaks to the rules is to improve regulations and to better protect public health. There are dozens of subcommittees slated to meet, including Water Quality Classification, Enforcement, Laboratory Methods, Recall Guidance and many more.

For the past few years most of the work of the ISSC seems to have revolved around *Vibrio* issues, but new water-quality monitoring techniques have ushered in opportunities to address complicated problems, such as viruses coming out of wastewater treatment plants and harmful algal blooms.

About 500 people typically attend these meetings. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shows up in force, as do state regulators from every producing state. **It is crucial that industry folks attend because the regulators often have blind spots.** They may have some idea of what we do and some idea of how to

protect public health, but crafting good regulations is difficult work and the law of unintended consequences often rears its ugly head. The more folks who can read these regulatory proposals with a critical eye, the better our chances of making fixes before they get written into regulation.

One proposal in the works is a much-needed rewrite of the entire aquaculture chapter. This should prove to be especially challenging, and I expect some of these discussions may be contentious.

Some of the more important proposals that will be discussed this year include:

13-209 Defines “resubmergence” and sets criteria for reconditioning shellstock to bring *Vibrio* levels down to background levels after having been kept out of the water to control fouling or other purposes.

17-100 and **17-101** both aim to refine the definition of “marina” to exclude mooring fields under certain conditions.

17-206 is an FDA proposal that would reduce the number of *Vibrio* illnesses that would trigger closures and recalls.

17-115 would allow the reconditioning of product that had been implicated in a Norovirus outbreak so it would not have to be destroyed.

17-216 is an FDA proposal that would require restaurants to label tags to indicate when product was served, and to store them in chronological order.

17-223 is an FDA proposal that would require land-based, wet-storage operations to conduct a validation study to demonstrate that the process does not increase *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* levels. This would be so expensive that most wet-storage operations would find it difficult to stay in operation.

There are many more proposals to keep an eye on, including the aquaculture chapter rewrite and older proposals that were stuck in committee that attempt to define seed and regulate sources of seed. These will need to be refined in committee meetings before going back for a vote.

I will attempt to craft a summary of key proposals for circulation on the LISTSERV in the weeks ahead. I have also set up a separate LISTSERV dedicated to discussing the proposals. To sign up for this group visit ECSCA.org, click on the “Join listserv” button on the top menu, and click on the link to join. From the URI Listserv page select the list name: ECSCA-NSSP-REVIEW and follow the prompts.

An advertisement for R. Murphy Knives. It features a collection of various knives with different handle materials and blade shapes. The text includes the company name "R. MURPHY KNIVES SINCE 1850", "HANDCRAFTED IN AYER, MA", "CUSTOMIZE KNIVES WITH YOUR LOGO", a phone number "CALL 978-772-3481", a promotion "MENTION THIS AD FOR HALF OFF YOUR STENCIL FEE", and the website "www.rmurphyknives.com".



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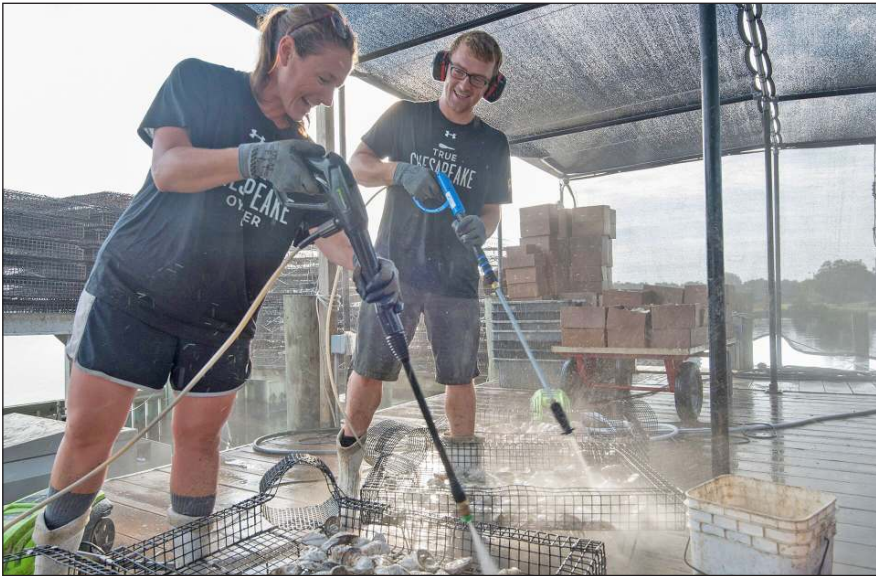
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ECSGA Photo Contest Winners

First Place



JAY FLEMING

Shannon Hood and Bobby Witkop pressure-wash oysters at True Chesapeake Oyster Co., St. Jerome Creek, in southern Maryland.

True Chesapeake founder Patrick Hudson grows oysters in off-bottom cages on a 10-acre farm in St. Jerome's Creek, in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay. Hudson said, "One thing that has struck me about this industry is that it takes a broad team to be successful. I've always considered Johnny Shockley and Hoopers Island Oyster Aquaculture (as well as the rest of the Maryland farms, for that matter) to be part of our team. We certainly wouldn't be where we are today without help from all the different people fighting the good fight in this industry. I think my company is one of the best examples of what happens when folks support each other. I'm not an engineer or a biologist or a waterman [but I] sure feel lucky to have some of those types on my team."

Second Place



LANE WEST

Percy West helping to bring in the weekly harvest at Cedar Island Oyster Farm, Point Judith Pond, in southern Rhode Island.

The West family farms around 20 acres in Point Judith Pond, a salt pond on Rhode Island's south shore. Percy's mother Cindy West said, "Percy and her sisters Lane and Ila have been working on this family farm since they were all about 8 and 9 years old. It has been a joy to have them being part of the fabric of this successful small farm. Farming has been very rewarding for our family, both for the opportunity to be so connected with nature and the growing process, as well as the education and experience that it has afforded our daughters!"

Eelgrass is Great

by Robert Rheault, ECSGA Executive Director

Sixteen years ago I presented a controversial paper at an aquaculture conference titled, *Eelgrass is Great, but Shellfish Aquaculture is Better*. I have nothing against eelgrass (*Zostera spp.*), but for decades we have seen it used as a tool to block aquaculture development, and I believe that logic is flawed. For decades eelgrass-protection efforts have stymied shellfish culture projects around the country, most recently threatening to shutter a 65-year-old farm in Humboldt Bay, Calif. (If you want to become enraged check out this article in the American Spectator: spectator.org/california-in-an-oyster-shell)

Everyone loves eelgrass because of the ecosystem services it provides. Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) is even protected in federal law because it serves as essential fish habitat and provides prime nursery grounds for dozens of species of fish and invertebrates.

Some of the other ecosystem services attributed to eelgrass include coastal protection and sediment stabilization, providing food, nitrogen uptake and improving water quality. According to a recent publication (Nordlund et al. 2016*) hundreds of researchers globally

have published more than 5500 publications on sea grasses (3000 on *Zostera* alone) and many scientists have made careers of studying SAV.

I don't dispute any of this, but I contend that **all the reasons why we love eelgrass apply equally to shellfish aquaculture, which provides similar ecosystem services**. Our animals filter the water, improving clarity and removing nitrogen, mitigating the symptoms of eutrophication. Our gear (and the shellfish inside) provide wonderful habitat for dozens of varieties of juvenile fish and invertebrates, who love the structure and all the hiding spots as well as all the food they glean from fouling organisms.

A study on my farm compared the populations associated with oyster cages to those in a nearby eelgrass bed and found 10 to 10,000 times as many critters in the oyster cages. Another Rhode Island study revealed that for rocky-reef-associated species, the habitat value of oyster cages was at least as good as restored and natural rocky-reef habitat nearby.

Oyster farmers in Humboldt Bay are under fire from hunters who claim that the oyster farms will cause a 3-percent decline in eelgrass cover-



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age, which will in turn result in unacceptable declines in the population of Pacific black brant geese, which forage for eelgrass during their migration between Mexico and the far North. This has the hunters up in arms against the farm, despite several studies showing that forage opportunities for waterfowl around farms are often enhanced.

I recommend regulating based on the ecosystem services of the proposed project. If an oyster farm is going to displace some eelgrass, chances are that from an ecosystem viewpoint this is not a bad thing. **If we can get the regulatory agencies to acknowledge that there is habitat equivalence in the value of eelgrass and shellfish farming, then sustainable seafood production can develop in harmony with nature.** I believe we have to find a way to get there, and I will continue to push this rock up the hill. You don't get to be a shellfish farmer without demonstrating extraordinary persistence.

* *Seagrass Ecosystem Services and Their Variability Across Genera and Geographical Regions* (2016) Lina Mtwana Nordlund, L.M.; Koch, E.W.; Barbier, E.B. & J.C. Creed. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0163091

Member Profile

NELCO Products, Inc: Marking and Identifying Shellfish Lines and Gear

Zip ties and heat-shrink tubing are not just for wiring anymore.

For more than 30 years, Nelco Products has been a pioneer in supplying cable ties and related wire-management products all over the world. Cable ties, more commonly known as zip ties, have thousands of other uses besides the wire management applications they were originally created for.

In recent years, the fishing and shellfish industries have come under more stringent regulations governing the marking and identification of lines and gear. Cable ties and heat-shrink tubing of-



fer a very affordable and simple solution to complying with those regulations

Heat-Shrink Tubing

Heat-shrink tubing is a multi-purpose product available from Nelco. We were first introduced to the fishing industry when the National Marine Fisheries Service announced the requirements for a color system for identifying buoy lines.

With its ability to endure harsh environments such as salt water, fungus and extreme temperatures, as well as the availability of different colors, heat shrink has become the ideal means for identifying and color-coding buoy lines. Heat shrink can also be custom printed by Nelco's in-house custom printing department.

Cable Ties

Cable ties are made from weather- and corrosion-resistant materials and come in an assortment of different colors and sizes. They offer easy, fast and economical installation for gear, color coding or to seal harvest bags. Nelco also offers custom hot-stamping on cable ties for personalization.

Located in Pembroke, Mass., Nelco is local to many shellfish aquaculture and fishing business-



es, making it simple to accommodate the needs of these industries.

For more information contact Nelco at:

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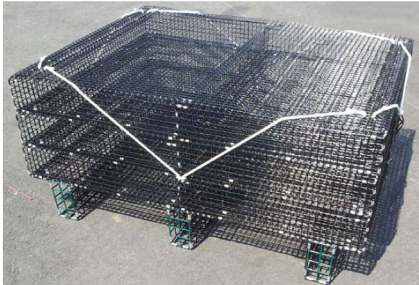
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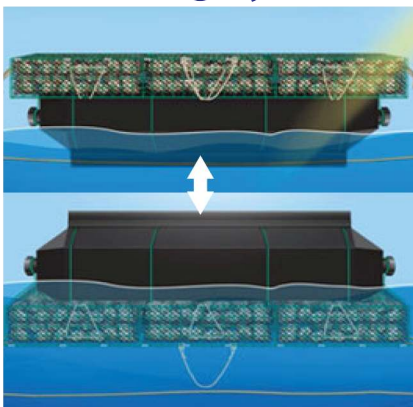
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Tal Petty Md. Board Member

Tal founded Hollywood Oyster Company in 2010, became a full-time oyster farmer in 2013 and produces Sweet Jesus and Hollywood oysters. Tal met his wife, Na, on an oyster farm in Thailand; together they shuck and eat many oysters!



Meet the Newly Elected ECSGA Board Members

Hollywood Oyster Company is 100-percent solar powered and is an active member of its community in coastal Maryland.

Tal enjoys visiting with other oyster farmers around the state, region and country to share tips, threats and techniques; he believes in the farming ethos of scratching each other's backs. He is active in the ECSGA, participating in the association's annual Walk on the Hill in Washington, D.C., to promote legislation focused on aquaculture.

To find out what Tal and Na are currently up to, follow them on social media and visit their web site, HollywoodOyster.com

Johnny Shockley Equipment Dealer

Johnny Shockley is a third-generation waterman, born and raised on Hoopers Island, Md. After graduating from high school, Johnny became a fulltime waterman, building his first work boat, *The Islander*. After harvesting blue crabs, oysters and fish on the Chesapeake Bay for several years, he became intrigued with the opportunities developing around oyster aquaculture.

In 2010, Johnny and Ricky Fitzhugh created Hoopers Island Oyster Aquaculture Company, in hopes of establishing a new indus-



try around sustainable aquaculture in Maryland. Johnny developed a full line of oyster aquaculture equipment, customized to meet the needs of a new industry. He currently captains the *Chesapeake Gold*, harvesting fresh Chesapeake Gold and Holy Grail Oysters.

To learn more, visit www.hoopersisland.com.



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— Continued from page 1
New Lobbyist Hired

The entire board is very excited to have Matt's help getting these issues passed in D.C. As executive director I can't travel to Washington every month, but Matt does this for a living and has established solid relationships in key congressional offices. Unfortunately, this will put a serious dent in our budget. We are appealing to our members to step up and help achieve our target of \$25,000 raised through donations and new memberships.

Please let me know if you can help to recruit a few new members or if you can send in a supplemental donation.

We already have received \$19,200, and the ECSGA board has committed to match member donations. The more we raise, the longer we can keep our lobbyist working on our behalf.



We invite you to mail in a supplemental donation today so we can continue to support these important (and expensive) initiatives that have the potential to really improve your bottom line. In the box at right are some of the ECSGA members who have already donated.

Questions? Contact:

Bob Rheault,
(401) 783-3360.

Checks can be mailed to our treasurer at:

ECSGA,
1623 Whitesville Rd.,
Toms River, NJ 08755

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- \$ 5,000 Chad Ballard, Cherrystone Aqua Farms
- \$ 4,000 Tonie Simmons, Muscongus Bay Aquaculture
- \$ 2,500 Island Creek Oyster Co.
- \$ 2,500 Ocean State Aquaculture Association
- \$ 2,000 SPAT (Wellfleet Shellfish Promotion and Tasting)
- \$ 1,000 Ben Lloyd, Pangea Shellfish
- \$ 500 Alex Hay, Wellfleet Shellfish Co.
- \$ 500 Bob Ketcham, Ketcham Trap
- \$ 500 Bill Mook/Jeff Auger, Mook Seafarm
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- \$ 200 Nancy Follini and Joe Gilbert, Briarpatch Enterprises, Inc.

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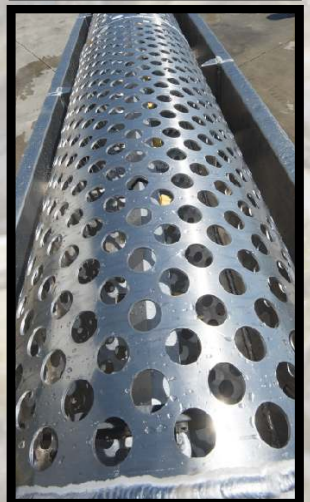


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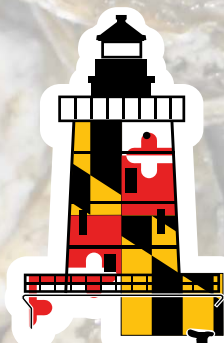
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