



Rookie Mistakes to Avoid

Don't make the same costly errors I made

Bob Rheault
East Coast Shellfish Growers Association

bob@ECSGA.org
www.ECSGA.org

Don't think you know everything

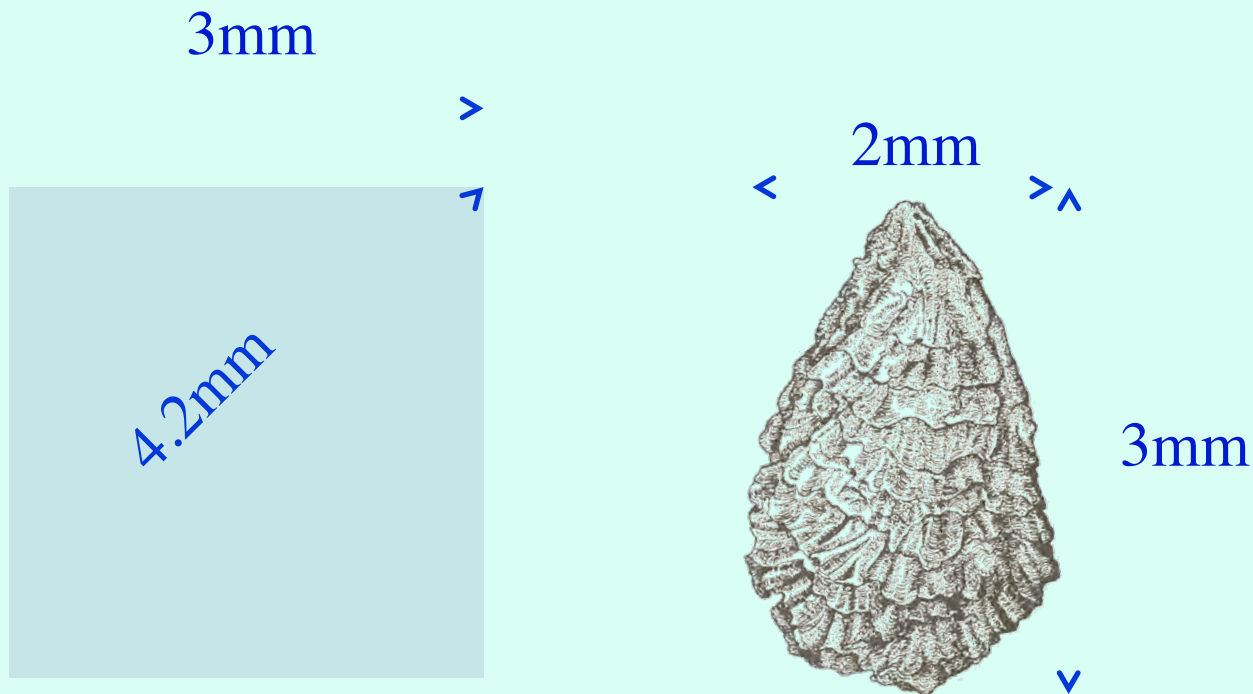
- Get advice
- Volunteer on another farm
- Hire a consultant
- Each of these is cheaper than making a big mistake

(#1 mistake of new growers)
Don't Let Greed Overcome Common Sense

- Don't buy more seed than you have gear to hold it in or time to maintain (#1 mistake of new growers)
- Overcrowding and fouled gear yields poor growth, thin meats, mortalities



Seive Size \neq Seed Size



Check before you plant -
A close fit is not a good fit

If seed size is too close to mesh size – seed will grow into the mesh



You will probably kill many
trying to extract them

Start Small make less costly errors

You can learn almost as much by killing a few thousand as you can by killing millions



Mother Nature is your partner, but she is not your friend

Waves have incredible
power

Size anchors, ropes etc.
for the worst case

Use stainless fasteners,
pinch pennies
elsewhere



Learn to grow large seed first

You will have market size product sooner

Small seed can be tricky to work with

Large seed is more expensive, but seed will never be one of your top expenses



Ordering Seed

Order early

Send deposit in February

Order from several
hatcheries

Sell surplus seed



Flow > Grow > Dough

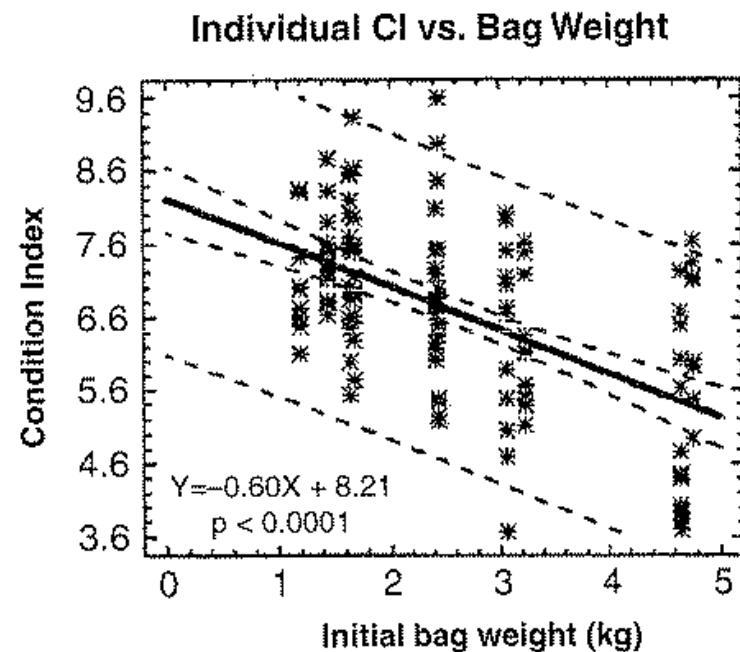
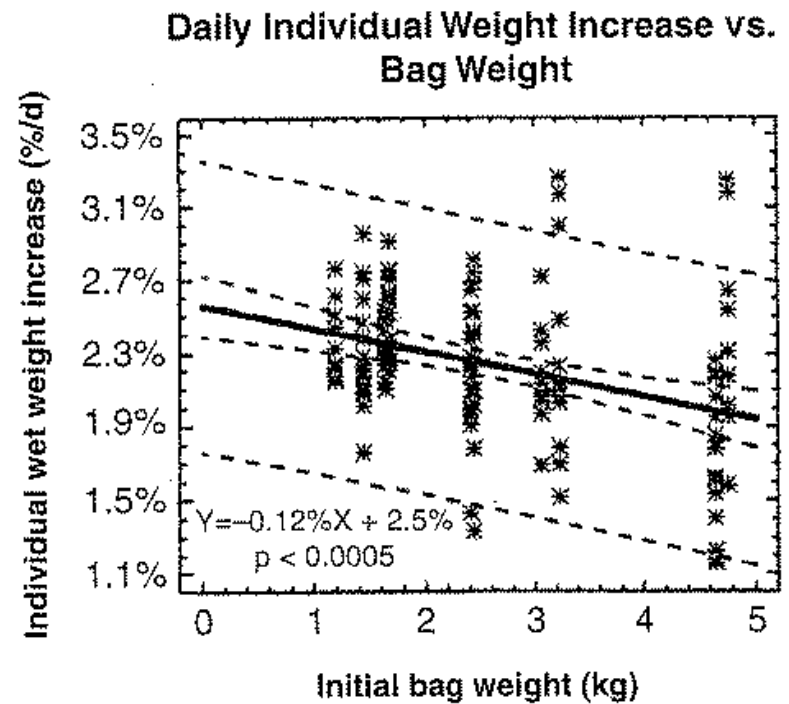
- Flow rate important for dense populations

Seston flux = current x concentration

- Concentration and composition important
- If food is limiting - growth slows, condition index suffers, more susceptible to diseases and variation in size increases, longer to harvest size (more sieving, more gear, more work)
- Optimum stocking density determined by size, species, food concentration and flow

Food Availability

- Flow x Conc = Flux
- flux is ration / day
- Growth
- Condition Index
- Stocking density
- Gear & labor cost
- Profitability



Our Fundamental Challenge

How can I protect my crop from predators

Yet still maximize flow rate / stocking density

While maintaining millions of live animals

In durable, inexpensive containers that are easy to maintain ?

Starving oysters don't grow

90% of the flow goes around a clean $\frac{1}{2}$ mesh bag

99% goes around a fouled bag or a very fine mesh bag

No flow - no grow - no dough



Brine dips are great unless they get hot
a ten minute dip in 110 degree brine is
probably 100% lethal



Diversify

- If you can grow multiple species in multiple sites you have a better chance of not losing everything all at once.
- If you are starting out, try multiple gear types... don't pretend you know it all.

Be a good neighbor

- You are working in public waters
- Don't make a mess, don't break the laws, don't get people sick.
- Use the ECSGA Best Management Practices template, develop a farm plan

Don't Quit Your Day Job

- It will take you longer to make a profit than you think
- Plan to lose a crop every ten years
- When you scale up you mortality rate and costs will go up faster than you projected
- Spreadsheets are great, but shellfish can't read

Make friends

- Get to know you neighbors
- Talk to other growers
- Talk to your regulators
- Talk to your extension agent
- Join your state association

NAP Insurance is cheap

- Talk to your local Farm Service Agent about signing up for Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance
- Not great coverage, but it sure is cheap
- Don't wait until after the hurricane

Take lots of notes

- Waterproof notebooks from Forestry Supply are cheap
- Memories are usually unreliable
- Documenting a loss is only possible if you have documentation
- Write down planting densities, survival rates, harvest times, temperatures, extreme weather events....

Cut costs

- Cutting costs is the fastest way to improve your profit margin
- Increasing sales provides an incremental gain, but only if you have a positive profit margin
- If you are losing money on each oyster, selling more doesn't help

You make money by selling shellfish not by growing them

- Spend some time thinking about how you will sell your product
- The Marketing Plan may be the most important chapter of your business plan
- Good advice on the ECSGA website

A Few Thoughts on Marketing

- Differentiate your product from competitors
Taste, shape, packaging, service, freshness, quality, consistency -
- Tell a story, sell the experience
- Don't compete on price unless you can be the low-cost producer - avoid the drive to the bottom
- Quality makes the difference
- Figure out who your customer is and what they want - and then deliver it to them

Never Drop Your Price

- If you sell out before May you can probably charge more. You are leaving money on the table.
- We typically see a nationwide shortage of quality oysters in the spring
- If you are still holding inventory in July then consider a price cut

To get a copy of this and more send me an
e-mail bob@ECSGA.org

