Rookie Mistakes to Avoid
Don’t make the same costly errors I made

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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
Don’t Let Greed Overcome Common Sense

(#1 mistake of new growers)

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 ≠ 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 ½ 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 then you think
• Plan to lose a crop every ten years
• When you scale up you mortality rate and costs will go up faster then 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
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