

# EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSOCIATION



The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association represents over 1,500 shellfish farmers from Maine to Florida and the Gulf states. 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.

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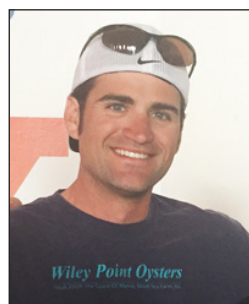
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## From the President

### Advocating for You Is Job 1



President  
Jeff Auger

If you've never joined the ECSGA on one of our trips to D.C. or a meeting of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC), you're missing two of the biggest reasons to support the association. These events provide major opportunities to influence federal legislation and regulations. Attending them has been a top priority for more than

20 years, and experience has taught us how to be effective advocates for your needs.

My first Hill walk occurred almost 10 years ago. I remember traveling down to a wintry D.C. to discuss ocean acidification, *Vibrio* regulations and Red Knot issues. Those initial trips were largely spent educating staffers and agency officials about shellfish aquaculture. We have a great story to share about sustainable seafood, jobs and environmental benefits. Now many Hill staffers are eager to help us grow our businesses and protect our livelihoods. Of course, it doesn't hurt that we throw a great shellfish and wine reception that they all want an invite to.

This year we brought 16 growers to 30 meetings with agencies, representatives and senators. We split into teams and put on over 9 miles racing from office to office. For a bunch of folks who usually work in muddy Grundens, we cleaned up pretty well, and I think we got our message across quite effectively. (See the full story below.)

### The Long-Awaited Return of Walk the Hill in D.C.

by Robert Rheault,  
ECSGA Executive Director

After a three-year break for COVID-19 we were finally able to get back to in-person meetings in D.C., and this year's Walk the Hill event in April was a great success. The ECSGA fielded a team of 16 members from 10 East Coast states who met with staffers of 30 congressional offices, educating them about shellfish farming in their states and the needs of our industry. We also made time to meet with the leadership of NOAA and USDA. Joining us on this trip were our friends from the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association (PCSGA) and Paul Zajicek from the National Aquaculture Association (NAA).

In our meetings we stressed the importance of several issues, including some requested tweaks to the Farm Bill, a need to expand our oyster breeding program to include hard clams, and a plea to help us preserve working waterfront access for commer-

Just a few weeks before the Hill Walk many ECSGA members attended the biennial ISSC meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (Story on page 2). This event allows industry members to take part in the debates determining the health and sanitation regulations governing shellfish aquaculture. It's critical to have an industry presence during this meeting because regulators often propose or change rules without a full appreciation of the potential impacts to our farms and our livelihoods.

Before each meeting, our executive director and several ISSC veterans spend a huge amount of time coordinating and educating ECSGA members, so we were pretty well coached far in advance of the five-day meeting. With about 30 subcommittees and nearly 100 regulatory proposals to be voted on this year, the extensive prep work was crucial.

Federal issues have a tremendous impact on our work. Most of us are pretty much in tune with our local and state politics, but it is also essential to have representation in front of the Food and Drug Administration, NOAA, USDA and Congress. Over the years I have seen the ECSGA successfully push back against harmful regulations and notch big wins (like the Jones Act exemption).

The working-waterfront issue we championed in D.C. this spring illustrates this perfectly. We were able to build a consensus around different industries, states and political affiliations to generate support for funding to protect and preserve our working waterfronts, which are quickly being eroded by condominiums and mansions. There is still much work to be done before any money is allocated (go, Bob go) but getting in front of our national representatives is a necessary first step.

—Continued on page 8



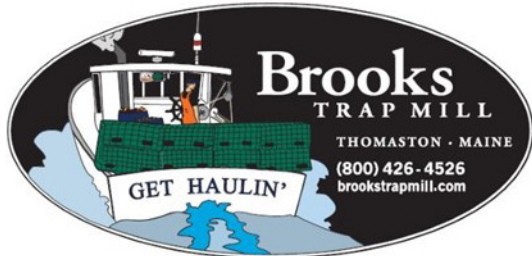
A dozen of the 16 participants of the 2023 Walk the Hill event take a break and pose for a pic in the halls of the Cannon House office building at the U.S. Capitol.

cial boats. On the fun side, we co-hosted a fantastic reception with the great folks from Wine America and the Wine Institute, where we served hundreds of staffers and dozens of members of Congress almost 2,000 oysters sourced from both coasts.

Of course, we also said thanks to those members who helped us pass our Jones Act exemption for aquaculture workers, and made clear our continued support for NOAA, Sea Grant and the many research grant programs we depend on.

—Continued on page 11





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## ISSC Meeting Productive

by Robert Rheault,  
ECSGA Executive Director

The biennial meeting of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) is one of the most consequential events that the ECSGA participates in. It's where the regulations that govern shellfish growing, harvesting, shipping and handling are crafted. The ISSC is officially operated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), but the rules are really drafted and enforced by the State Shellfish Control Authorities (SSCAs). The rules become codified in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program Guide (NSSP), sometimes referred to as the Model Ordinance ([www.issc.org/2019-nssp-guide](http://www.issc.org/2019-nssp-guide)).

The ISSC meets every other year (we had a three-year break because of COVID-19) and participants offer edits and changes to the NSSP that are debated and considered by the State Authorities. This year there were 115 proposed edits to the NSSP. Although industry members get to attend and have a role

in debating proposals, the real voting power lies with the State Authorities. The FDA plays a large part in debating proposals, and they come to the meeting in force. Although the FDA does not get to vote on proposals, after all is said and done they do get to veto any changes they don't approve of.

The conferences typically last for five days and are jam-packed with committee meetings and strategy meetings attended by the various factions that are trying to advance, defeat or edit certain proposed changes. It is critical that industry members show up because we are the ones who understand how these regulations are going to impact us. Writing regulations for our highly diverse industry is incredibly challenging; the law of unintended consequences invariably means that someone's ox is getting gored by the unforeseen impact of a "shall" or a "may."

Members of the ECSGA and the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association spent weeks before the conference reviewing the proposals and evaluating each one to determine if the impacts would be bearable or not. Teams of growers and SSCAs met over Zoom to discuss each proposal and devise a strategy to either support, oppose or edit each one.

The 500-page NSSP covers a vast array of issues. Quite a bit of deliberation goes into making sure the laboratories that do our testing are all following standard protocols for harmful algal bloom and pathogen detection, and a big part of the conference continues to revolve around trying to minimize *Vibrio* illnesses. The NSSP covers everything from harvest vessels to wet storage to the plumbing in your dealer's shop. The ISSC has about two-dozen subcommittees covering a multitude of issues from *Vibrio* management to laboratory methods to foreign relations. Fortunately, most of the dozens of hours of committee deliberations take place before the conference itself.

If you want to see the results of our votes they can all be found online at [www.issc.org/2023-issc-biennial-meeting](http://www.issc.org/2023-issc-biennial-meeting). Over the next four-to-six months the FDA will decide whether to

—Continued on page 7



**Shellfish Growers Climate Coalition**

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# Nature Conservancy and Pew Expand Oyster Restoration And Resiliency Initiative

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) will expand their joint effort to rebuild oyster reefs and to promote innovation, resilience and diversity within the oyster aquaculture industry.

Over the next three years, the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) Purchase Program will buy up to 2.5 million farmed oysters from shellfish growers that will be used to rebuild reefs in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, California and Washington State. In addition to restoring 30 acres of



JERRY AND MARCY MONKMAN/  
ECOPHOTOGRAPHY, 2020

Brian Gennaco of Virgin Oyster Company displays an oyster as he readies his harvest to be added to a reef in Great Bay as part of the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program in Durham, New Hampshire.

oyster reef habitat, the program aims to support 100 oyster farms and 300 jobs. This work will be made possible by a \$3 million grant from the [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's National Coastal Resilience Fund](#)<sup>1</sup> and an additional \$3.3 million from [Builders Initiative](#)<sup>2</sup>, the philanthropic team of [Builders Vision](#)<sup>3</sup>.

The organizations are also renewing the SOAR Resiliency Fund, which provides small awards to farmers and aligned organizations for projects that advance marine conservation and create new economic opportunities for shellfish farmers. With support from Builders Initiative, the fund intends to support 50 industry-led projects. Applications will open later this year—for the latest information, visit [nature.org/SOAR](https://nature.org/SOAR).

This next phase of the SOAR project will build upon work that began initially to help shellfish farmers withstand market shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. SOAR's success in its first two years demonstrated how shellfish farmers benefit from a

reliable and diversified restoration market, in which oysters are sold not only as a delicacy, but also to help strengthen the nation's coastlines.

TNC has long invested in the shellfish farming community through its scientific collaborations, the development of siting tools, its assessment of ecosystem services, and the [Shellfish Growers Climate Coalition](#)<sup>4</sup>, which the organization helped found in 2018. Similarly, Pew and its partners work to improve the resilience of valuable coastal waters and habitats by identifying and advancing science-based conservation measures and solutions.

TNC and Pew look forward to continuing our partnership with the shellfish industry on the SOAR program, and welcome comments and feedback, which you can email to [soar@tnc.org](mailto:soar@tnc.org).

Sincerely,

The Nature Conservancy,  
The Pew Charitable Trusts

## Notes

1. [www.nfwf.org/programs/national-coastal-resilience-fund](https://www.nfwf.org/programs/national-coastal-resilience-fund)
2. [www.buildersinitiative.org/](https://www.buildersinitiative.org/)
3. [www.buildersvision.com/](https://www.buildersvision.com/)



JAY FLEMING, 2021

Oyster Recovery Project staffers planting oysters purchased through the SOAR program onto the Prospect Bay oyster sanctuary reef near Kent Island, Maryland. Over the next three years SOAR will buy up to 2.5 million farmed oysters from shellfish growers that will be used to restore 30 acres of oyster reef habitat in eight states, while supporting 100 oyster farms and 300 jobs.

4. [www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/tackle-climate-change/climate-change-stories/shellfish-growers-climate-coalition/](https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-priorities/tackle-climate-change/climate-change-stories/shellfish-growers-climate-coalition/)

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## Jones Act Exemption Passed by Congress! So What Does That Mean for Your Business?

by Robert Rheault,  
ECSCGA Executive Director

It only took us about 10 years, but we finally managed to get the Shellfish Aquaculture Improvement Act passed through Congress! So what does the act say and what does it mean for our members?

The text of the bill was short and sweet. Translated from legalese it says: if you are an aquaculture worker and you are eligible for state workers compensation insurance in your state, then you are not a "seaman" under the Jones Act (unless you are a li-

censed captain, in which case you are still a seaman).

A Jones Act seaman is someone who spends 30% or more of their job "in service of a vessel." If a seaman is injured at work, the Merchant Marine Act of 1916 (known as the Jones Act) allows that worker to sue his or her employer for "maintenance and cure." The employer's liability for that injury can be unlimited, with jury awards in these lawsuits often running to millions of dollars, enough to put most shellfish farmers out of business.

Most of the Jones Act is designed to promote domestic shipbuilding and puts large tariffs on non-U.S.-flagged ships carrying goods between states. The Jones Act dictates how much U.S. steel must be used in a U.S.-flagged vessel, and the percentage of Americans working on the vessel. A little-known provision of the act provides compensation for injured workers who travel on the high

seas from state to state or even internationally. It was unclear how those workers could be covered under state workers compensation programs, so the act created a means for them to recover health care costs and lost wages from their employers.

Now that aquaculture workers are exempt from the Jones Act, employers no longer need to buy expensive Jones Act insurance for their employees (unless they are licensed captains). Instead, they will need to pay into their state's Workers Compensation Plan. Employers will no longer have to fear crippling unlimited liability lawsuits, and employees will not have to hire lawyers to sue their employers for health care when they get injured on the job. In states where Workers Compensation rates are very high the employers may end up paying more per employee, but at least the employers won't have to fear a catastrophic unlimited liability lawsuit.

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# NSA Session Report: Birds and Shellfish Sanitation

by Robert Rheault,  
ECSGA Executive Director

Back in March at the National Shellfisheries Association meeting held in Baltimore I organized a session on birds and shellfish sanitation. Featuring 11 speakers, the all-morning session was well attended and highly informative.

After the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) revised the aquaculture chapter of the Model Ordinance, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) insisted on adding a section mandating that if shellfish gear may attract birds or mammals, farms must have an operational plan describing how they propose to mitigate the risk of contamination.

There are several essential take-home messages to be gleaned from the talks:

1. Bird presence is seasonal and you may need deterrents for only a few months of the year, depending on your site.
2. Birds are smart and will acclimate to most deterrents, so growers may need to use several types and switch them up.
3. Growers should make efforts to repel birds from gear simply to avoid the risk of getting a high fecal coliform (FC) sample that could shut down the harvest area. Even if you are just growing seed you probably cannot afford to have your growing area closed.
4. Growers in deeper waters with large tidal exchanges will have a lower risk of high FC counts, but you may not want to risk it. Your state control authority will dictate what measures you need to take.
5. Human enteric pathogens are quite rare in wild bird waste, and the FC standard is a poor indicator of risk in waters that are impacted only by wild-life. However, the risk is not zero and cannot be ignored. Furthermore, even if pathogen risk is low, the presence of guano in food is unacceptable and illegal under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
6. There are lots of unknowns and many areas of research still in need of attention.

## Session highlights

Dr. Martina Müller of the University of Rhode Island presented some of her team’s work observing birds around shellfish aquaculture farms in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. She noted



NY DEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

When the ISSC revised the aquaculture chapter of the Model Ordinance, the FDA insisted on adding a section mandating that if shellfish gear may attract birds or mammals, farms must have an operational plan describing how they propose to mitigate the risk of contamination. Growers should make every effort to repel birds from gear to avoid the risk of getting a high fecal coliform (FC) sample that could shut down the harvest area.

that bird presence is highly seasonal, with most of the roosting activity by gulls, terns and cormorants occurring in the late summer/early fall season, and with bird activity expected to vary both regionally and seasonally. The URI team is looking forward to more weekly observations on farms in 2023. (Read the full presentation on [ECSGA.org](https://www.ecsga.org)<sup>1</sup>)

Four speakers described a variety of approaches to repelling birds, including monofilament line, zip-tie “ticklers,” scare kites, sprinklers, OysterGro® BirdAway hawk systems, wire tufts and gull sweeps. Many of these are pictured on the [Bird Interactions page](https://www.ecsga.org)<sup>2</sup> at ECSGA.org. All the devices required maintenance and many interfered with the operation of floating gear. The researchers concluded that floating bags are much more challenging to protect than the OysterGro® / FlowNGrow™ type cages.

David Borkman of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management described a *Campylobacter* illness outbreak that hospitalized eight oyster consumers who ate product harvested from a shallow, poorly-flushed growing area in October of 2021.

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## ISSC Wrap-Up

concur on certain proposals (or veto them) and the revised 2023 National Shellfish Sanitation Program Model Ordinance will become the new law of the land.

It's difficult to summarize the outcome of two days of deliberations on some 115 proposed edits and changes to the NSSP, but I can say that the tone this year was less acrimonious than in past years. The state regulators were largely in harmony with the industry representatives, and the FDA only occasionally voiced strong opposition to the positions being voiced. I strongly advise getting to know your state regulators and trying to maintain good relationships with them.

Overall, I was quite pleased with the outcomes. Most of the proposed changes I thought should be adopted were passed, and the proposals I was hoping would go away were killed or sent back to committee for further debate and refinement. The process worked, no punches were thrown and no one seemed terribly upset at the outcomes. It is an arcane and often frustrating process, but it appears to be working well.

One of the bigger achievements was the adoption of new guidance for aquaculture that may attract birds or mammals. Guidance is not regulation, but at least it provides the states with uniform thinking on how to deal with the vexing issues presented by the sanitation concerns of bird waste on floating gear. (See related article on page 5)

Please thank those industry members who took five days away from work (and spent thousands on lodging and travel to Baton Rouge, Louisiana) to represent your interests. We also owe a debt of gratitude to those who have been working for many months on the numerous committees to add refinements that helped develop the language of many of these changes. The subcommittee reports make for quite interesting reading (if you are into this kind of stuff) and can be found at [www.issc.org/2023-committee-reports](http://www.issc.org/2023-committee-reports).

I strongly encourage industry members to get involved and join the ISSC. These regula-



KIM THOMPSON/PCSGA

Each of the 115 proposals to change the NSSP was debated by a panel of industry members and regulators.

Audience members chimed in to support or oppose those changes. Although the FDA participates in the debate, they do not have a vote, but they do have the power to veto any changes.

tions impact every aspect of our industry and if you're not at the table making the rules, then you don't have a right to complain about the outcome. And if you really hate some of the regulations you have to abide by, then consider making a proposal to change them in two years at the next conference. I am happy to help. If you don't have time to get involved, then all the more reason to support the work of the ECSGA, which will continue to show up to protect your interests.

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## Rookie Mistakes

Whether you've been growing shellfish for years or are just starting out, it never hurts to review some common rookie mistakes that could end up costing you a bundle. Visit [ecsga.org/rookie-mistakes](https://ecsga.org/rookie-mistakes) to watch the video or to read the full list.

### Tips for Success

1. **Don't get greedy.** Never buy or plant more seed than you have gear to hold it or time to maintain it. Overcrowding and poor husbandry lead to poor growth and bad meat condition, and could lead to diseases and overwinter mortality. Overstock-

ing bags and failing to stay on top of fouling is the most common cause of crop failure.

2. **If you put oyster seed in a bag with openings that are too close to the seed size, many will grow into the mesh and you will have to kill them to separate them from the bag.** Rule of thumb: mesh size of

the sieve should be ~1.5 times the mesh size of the bag you are going into.

3. **Learn the difference between sieve size and seed size.** 3-mm seed will not be retained in a 3-mm mesh bag. Order seed that is retained on a mesh larger than your smallest mesh or ask the hatchery what size screens they sort their seed on. Since they may ship the wrong size, when you get your seed, test it in a way where you can recover any seed that slips through the mesh.



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4. **Learn to walk, before you run.** Start with large seed. It costs more, but time to market is shorter and you'll avoid some of the pitfalls of working with small seed. If you lose a cup of 1-mm seed you have lost 250,000 animals. If you lose a cup of 1/2" seed you won't notice the difference.

5. **Sign up for ELAP coverage:** it will pay out 70-90% of the value of your crop loss from a storm or freeze. Don't wait until after the hurricane hits. Read all about it in our [August 2021 newsletter](#) or visit the [USDA website](#).

6. **Join your industry associations: state, local and national.** They work hard advocating for you and rely on your support.

—Continued from page 1  
**From the President**

If you have any desire to join us on these outings please reach out—we need all the help and support we can get. Similarly, if there are issues that you think we should be focusing on or need to be aware of, please let us know. We are here to help you grow and sustain your business and your livelihood.

Also please thank the farmers and business owners who took time away from work and spent thousands of their hard-earned dollars to travel to D.C. and Louisiana to advocate on your behalf.

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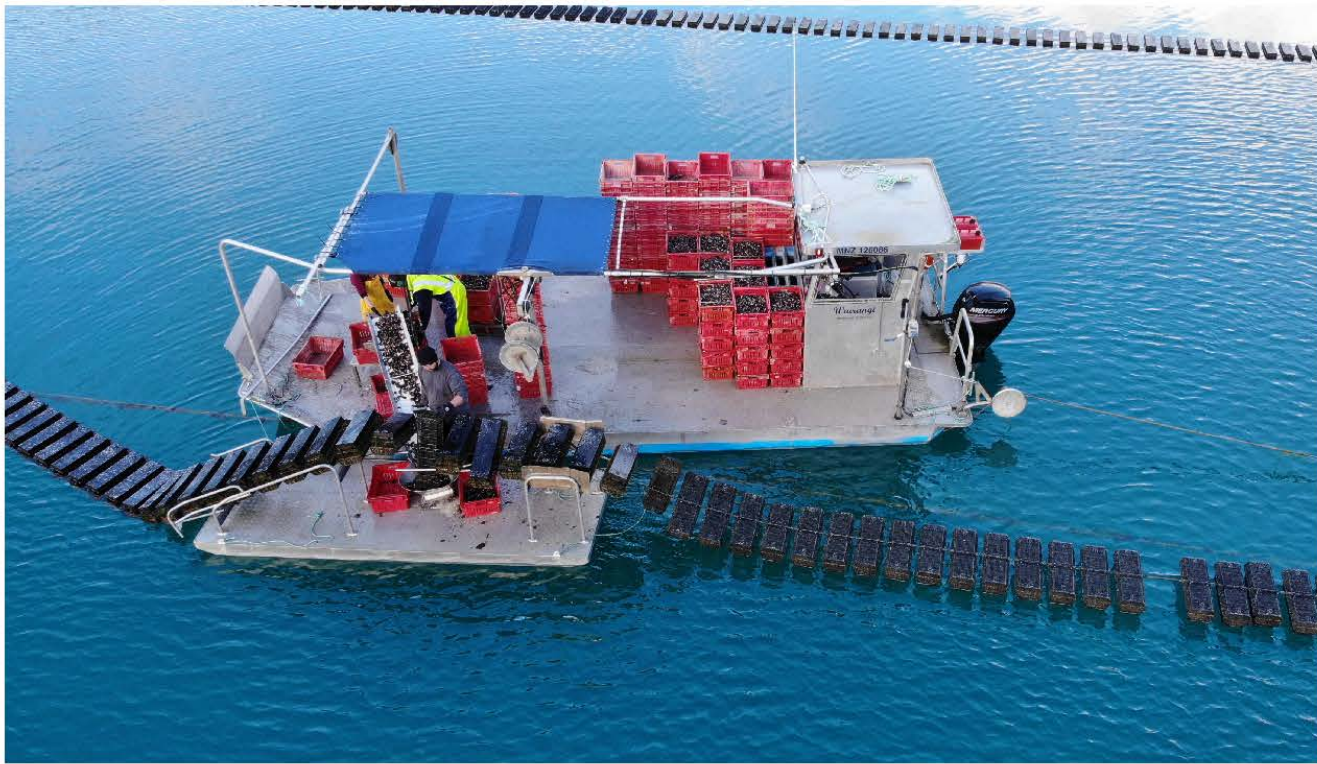


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—Continued from page 5  
**Birds and Sanitation**

While water samples taken 70 feet from the lease just a few days prior had tested clean, meat samples taken after the illnesses were reported showed quite high levels of the bacteria, demonstrating just how challenging sampling can be. Once the grower sank the floating gear it took less than 18 days for the meats to test clean.

Steve Jones of the University of New Hampshire reported on

years of microbial source-tracking work where he observed bird-related microbial contamination in most samples. The fact that there have been only a handful of illnesses related to shellfish consumption hammers home the fact that the prevalence of human pathogens in wild bird waste is quite rare.

Dr. Rachel Nobel of the University of North Carolina emphasized the need for more studies. She pointed out that molecular techniques can be useful in identifying whether observed

FC come from a human source, where risk is well established, or from wildlife, where risk is poorly understood. Unfortunately, most molecular techniques only indicate the presence of genes, but cannot tell you if the pathogens are viable, or if they have died baking in the sun on a black float. Furthermore, unless you culture the pathogens and identify the strains, it is usually difficult to say whether they pose a threat to humans at all, since most pathogens are highly species-specific.

Chris Schillaci, NOAA's Regional Aquaculture Coordinator in the Greater Atlantic Region, summarized the 14 pages of guidance that had just been adopted at the March ISSC meeting (pending FDA approval). In developing the guidance, the Aquaculture Committee of the ISSC tried to provide states with a range of options to help them determine how best to manage bird problems, **encouraging state regulators to consider tidal flow and depth before mandating expensive repellent measures and mandatory re-submergence protocols.**

Bobbi Hudson, executive director of the Pacific Shellfish Institute, did a magnificent job summarizing many of the known unknowns, drawing on a number



URI/RI DEM

Since birds are smart and quickly acclimate to deterrents, you may have to use a variety of approaches and mix them up. These could include monofilament line, zip-tie "ticklers," scare kites, sprinklers, OysterGro® BirdAway hawk systems, wire tufts and gull sweeps.

of publications that describe the rarity of human pathogens in wildlife waste, and the challenges of estimating risk in a sea of uncertainty. Clearly, the risk of contamination in areas with massive 12-foot tides (like Washington State) is not the same as it might be in an area like Maryland or the Gulf of Mexico, where 3-foot tides are more the norm. Hudson quoted a recent meta-analysis indicating that "data are too limited and biased to make data-driven recommendations for managing wild birds to reduce enteric pathogen spillover to people." Her presentation contains a lot of useful information and resources and is posted at [ECSGA.org](https://ecsga.org)<sup>3</sup>.

I remain hopeful that the new molecular tools allowing for source tracking on coliform samples will eventually help regulators consider ways to avoid closing growing areas when high FC counts can be tracked to birds and when human sources can be ruled out. I am also confident that growers will continue to develop cost-effective, workable repellents to deter birds in areas where low tidal flushing indicates the need for such measures.

**Notes**

1. [ecsga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MullerNSA-2023BirdsAqPPT.pdf](https://ecsga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MullerNSA-2023BirdsAqPPT.pdf)
2. [ecsga.org/bird-interactions](https://ecsga.org/bird-interactions)
3. [ecsga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BirdsOnFloatingGearNSA2023.pdf](https://ecsga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/BirdsOnFloatingGearNSA2023.pdf)

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—Continued from page 1  
**Walk the Hill Returns**

Over two days we split into two teams to spread the good word about oyster, clam and mussel farming to various congressional offices (logging about 9 miles in suits and dress shoes). We have a great story to share and staffers were eager to hear it. While our efforts on the Farm Bill and clam breeding program will probably take at least a year to bear fruit, I think we really gained traction on the loss of working waterfront access. Bipartisan bills addressing this issue are currently being drafted in both the House and the Senate, and we will be following up with our contacts in the months ahead.

I encourage you to take a look at our [April newsletter](#), where I describe the growing crisis in commercial access to the water. Our members are being pushed out of marinas as the waterfront is being gentrified into condos, residential properties and recreational boat parking lots. If we really want to grow the blue economy, build wind power, and increase commercial fishing and aquaculture opportunities we are going to have to ensure that commercial boats have access to the water. It seems obvious, but you can't have a farm if you can't land your crops. If you are cc'd in an e-mail from me to your legislator, this is an invitation for you to chime in and reinforce our message. Tell them about your farm and your experiences and invite them to visit. They would much prefer to hear from you than from me!

Please thank the folks who took time off from work to spend big bucks to travel to D.C. and spread the word on your behalf. It is a big commitment of time and money. Jeff Auger (Atlantic Aqua Farms, Maine), Matty Gregg (Forty North Oyster Farms, New Jersey), Alex Hay (Wellfleet Shellfish Co., Massachusetts), Tal Petty (Hollywood Oyster Co., Maryland), Chris Matteo (Chadwick Creek Oysters, North Carolina), Thomas Cannon (Soundside Oyster Farms, North Carolina), Mark Casey (Delaware Cultured Seafood, Delaware), Mike Oesterling (Virginia Shellfish Growers, Virginia), Adrienne Johnson (Gulf Springs Sea Farm, Florida), Heather Ketcham (Ketcham Supply, Massachusetts), Matthew Weeks (Nantucket Sound Shellfish Co., Massachusetts), Kim Huskey (Ballard Fish and Oyster Co., Virginia), Jacob Feibusch (Davy Jones Shellfish Co., New York) and Paul Zajicek (National Aquaculture Association).

Also, thanks to Mere Point Oyster Co., Wellfleet Shellfish Co., Low Country Oyster Co., Hollywood Oyster Co. and Forty



TOM CANNON/SOUNDSIDE OYSTER FARM

North Oyster Farms for sending delicious product to share at the reception.

None of this would have been possible without the support of great partners like the PCSGA, the NAA and the wonderful folks at the Wine Caucus and the congressional offices who help run the Shellfish Caucus. They worked hard to ensure that we were able to bring oysters and shucking knives into the venue—kind of a key component of the whole event!

It was touch and go for a minute there when the new congressional caterers told us we could not bring oysters into the Wine and Shellfish reception venue, but thanks to the efforts of the Shellfish Caucus and the Wine Caucus, the caterers eventually relented. Hundreds of staffers and dozens of members of Congress consumed almost 2,000 oysters sourced from the East and West coasts, and washed them down with many bottles of wine.

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## Gulf Coast Update

by Terry Boyd,  
Magnolia Key Oyster Co.  
Biloxi, Mississippi

Over the last decade, Gulf Coast shellfish growers have weathered their share of ups and downs in the industry. As more farmers come online, they are dealing with the twin hurdles of harsh hurricane seasons and shortages of available seed. But on the plus side, Gulf waterfronts are homes to some of the most resilient communities in the country.

Seafood is a way of life here, and Gulf growers have cultivated a passion for providing some of the safest and highest

quality shellfish available. As we approach milestones in the industry, it's now more important than ever to provide support to growers in the region.

At the Oyster South Symposium in 2019, at a meeting to discuss the need for a Gulf Coast growers association, participants unanimously decided that it was imperative to form an association to represent the region. After some consideration, it became clear that a Gulf chapter of the ECSGA would be a way to get started until we could form our own association. And so with the help of Bill Walton and Bob Rheault, the Gulf chapter of the ECSGA was born. At the time Walton was working with shellfish farmers



TERRY BOYD

Terry Boyd is the interim director of the newly formed Gulf Shellfish Farmers Association and the Gulf Coast representative on the ECSGA board of directors.

as the marine extension specialist for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System and serving as director of the Auburn Univer-

sity Shellfish Lab located on Dauphin Island, on Alabama's Gulf Coast. It was only natural that he take the reins as the first Gulf Coast representative on the ECSGA's board of directors.

Then in 2021, when Walton was named Acuff Professor of Marine Science and Shellfish Aquaculture Program Coordinator at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, John Supan stepped in as Gulf Coast representative. Supan brought decades of experience in oyster biology, culture, sanitation and management to the position, and is currently the sole proprietor of Sea Farms Consulting LLC, which primarily sells components and complete bottle nursery systems.

—Continued on page 15



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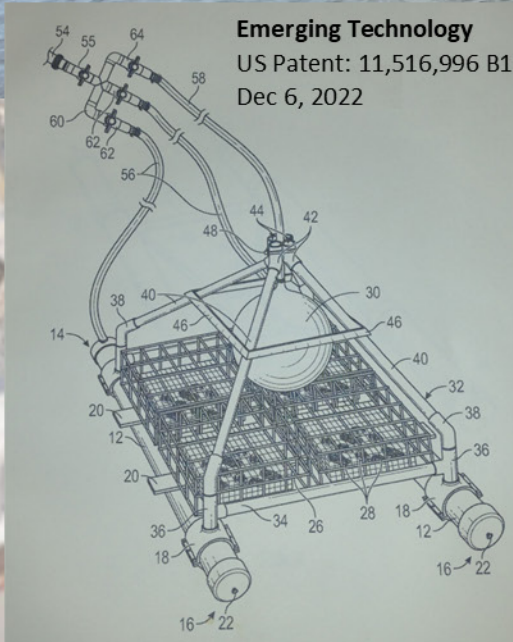
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—Continued from page 12  
**Gulf Coast Update**

Which brings us to the present day, as I take the reins as the ECSGA's newest Gulf Coast representative. Thanks to a grant from The Nature Conservancy's Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program, the Gulf Shellfish Farmers Association (GSFA) was recently formed to allow for state-level representation for Gulf growers. The project was led by the University of Southern Mississippi, whose dedicated staff have been tireless in fostering the industry in the Gulf. We are very grateful to have them on our side, and we owe special thanks to Dr. Reginald Blaylock and Megan Gima for all their hard work to make the GSFA a reality.

As the Gulf oyster industry starts to gain momentum, 2023 is sure to be a banner year for growers in the region. With more shellfish farmers entering the market, Gulf production should rise significantly over the next year. The seed crisis remains one of the main topics of discussion, but with at least one new hatchery and a few nurseries coming online this year, farmers should have the ability to scale up their operations.

The next few years are looking decidedly brighter. As we move forward, our main goal is to foster open lines of communication, which will be essential for our industry's success. The Gulf chapter of the ECSGA will strive to keep our members more informed and active in the coming years. In return, we want members to feel as if they can reach out to us whenever they have questions or concerns about any issues that may arise. There is strength in numbers, and the louder our collective voice, the more we will be heard.

Keep an eye on this industry—big things are sure to come.

Terry Boyd is the owner of Magnolia Key Oyster Co. in Biloxi, Mississippi. He has worked in the commercial fishing industry, as well as owning and operating his own charter fishing business. He earned a Business degree from the University of Southern Mississippi.

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Grower	over \$3 million	\$3,000
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