EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSOCIATION

From the Executive Director

Staying Ahead of the Issues: ISSC Proposal Review, Walk the Hill, and Why Your Membership Matters Now

by Christopher Schillaci,
ECSGA Executive Director



Executive Director Christopher Schillaci

Dear ECSGA members:

It is an honor to write to you for the first time as Executive Director of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association. I want to begin by thanking Bob Rheault for his tremendous work in building this association into what it is today. Bob and I will continue working closely together over the coming months to ensure a seamless transition, and we will be sharing details soon on an opportunity to gather and celebrate his many accomplishments.

As I get started, one of my top priorities is getting to know you, our members, and better understanding the challenges you face across regions and sectors. If you participate in state-level industry association meetings, I welcome the chance to attend, listen, and share what we are seeing nationally.

I also want to make sure you have clear visibility into the issues on the horizon. Two of those deserve your attention right now: the upcoming Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) meeting and our spring advocacy on Capitol Hill. Our ability to make a difference on both depends on a strong membership.

A Critical ISSC Cycle Ahead

The 2027 Biennial Meeting of the ISSC will be held January 24–29, 2027, right here on the East Coast in Newport, Rhode Island. Early indications suggest this cycle may resemble 2015 and 2017, when major issues with far-reaching implications for our industry came before the conference.

Several significant proposals and regulatory developments are already taking shape, including three proposals the ECSGA has submitted dealing with how the program responds to illnesses associated with *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*. These proposals are intended to prevent the unnecessary disruption that comes from ad hoc decision-making.

Decisions made through the ISSC process shape the National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP) and can affect growers, harvesters, processors, and state shellfish control authorities nationwide for years to come. It is essential that industry voices are at the table to keep these changes science-based, practical, and protective of both public health and industry sustainability.

Being at that table takes sustained work: drafting proposals, preparing positions, coordinating with our partners, and showing up in person for task-force deliberations. That work is made possible by your dues. Every membership renewal directly supports the ECSGA's ability to represent you when these decisions are made.

How Proposal Review Works, and Why Your Voice Matters

Once the ISSC Executive Office distributes submitted proposals, the ECSGA works closely with the Pacific Coast Shellfish

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When the Press Calls: Things to Do Before You Answer a Question

by Maria Smithson
Director of Membership & Marketing,
National Aquaculture Association

Talking to reporters isn't part of a grower's daily routine. But sooner or later, a reporter may call about your farm, a food-safety concern, or something happening in the industry. The key is to take your time, gather information, and be well prepared in deciding how, or if, to respond.

First: Ask Questions. Don't Give Answers—Yet

When a reporter calls, your first job isn't to answer questions. It's to gather information and agree to get back to them. Be courteous, but don't discuss anything before you understand the story and consider if and how you should respond.

Before agreeing to an interview, ask these questions:

1. **Who's calling?** Get the reporter's name, news outlet, phone number, and email address.
2. **What's the story about?** Ask what they're covering and why they're reaching out to you.
3. **What information are they looking for?** Are they seeking a specific fact, an industry perspective, or an interview about your operation?
4. **Who else are they talking to?** This can help you understand the scope of the story and what other perspectives may be included.
5. **What's their deadline?** Find out when they need your response. News deadlines can be tight, but that doesn't mean you have to answer questions immediately.
6. **When can you get back to them?** Thank them for calling or emailing, and tell them when you'll follow up. Then make sure you do.

Remember: You're gathering information, not giving an interview.

Next: Decide If and How You Should Respond

Is this actually your story to tell? If the reporter is asking about a regional or industry-wide issue, your aquaculture or shellfish association may be better positioned to respond. If it's a negative story about another farm, you likely don't want to



comment. You don't want your farm named in a negative story involving another farm or growing region.

Do you have the facts? Make sure you understand the issue before agreeing to discuss it. This is a good time to reach out to colleagues or your association to gather factual information.

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When the Press Calls

What is the reporter really looking for? Are they seeking a factual explanation, a firsthand perspective, scientific understanding, or your reaction to another farm's story? Knowing the difference can help you decide whether participating serves a useful purpose. A good question to ask yourself is: "*Will having me or my farm mentioned in this story benefit my business? Will it create reputational risk?*"

Your Response Options

- ❑ **An interview**: When you have relevant expertise and can offer useful information or perspective without putting your farm's reputation at unnecessary risk. Before the interview, prepare two or three key points you want to make, with facts and examples to support them.
- ❑ **A written statement**: When your farm is directly involved in a developing story and a response is warranted, but all the facts aren't yet available. A brief statement allows you to acknowledge the situation, provide verified information, and demonstrate that you're responding responsibly without speculating or committing to an interview.
- ❑ **Refer the story to an association**: When the issue is broader than your farm and requires an industry perspective.
- ❑ **Decline to participate**: Don't ignore the reporter or say, "No comment." Simply respond, "*Thank you for reaching out, but we're not the appropriate source for this story.*"



When a reporter calls, your first job isn't to answer questions. It's to gather information and agree to get back to them. Be courteous, but don't discuss anything before you understand the story and consider if and how you should respond.

If you do choose to give a media interview, consider contacting the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, the National Aquaculture Association, or another relevant industry organization for guidance or assistance. The important thing is to make that decision thoughtfully, rather than in the first 30 seconds of a reporter's phone call.

If You Do Choose to Speak With a Reporter

You know your farm, your growing practices, and the science behind your work. That's valuable expertise.

Speak plainly and authentically. Stick to what you know, don't speculate, and don't feel obligated to answer a question you can't answer accurately. It's perfectly acceptable to say you don't know something and offer to follow up.

You don't need polished talking points or complicated language. You need accurate information, a clear message, and the confidence to speak from your own experience.

One Last Thing

A media inquiry isn't automatically a crisis. Sometimes it's an opportunity to introduce people to your farm, explain responsible shellfish growing, or help the public better understand aquaculture.

The key is to approach the conversation thoughtfully rather than reactively.

A little preparation can make the difference between being caught off guard and making an informed decision about whether, when, and how to tell your story!



—*Continued from page 1*

Stay Ahead of the Issues

Growers Association (PCSGA) to host a series of review meetings. In these sessions we evaluate each proposal and decide whether the associations will support it, support it with recommended modifications, or oppose it. We also develop the rationale behind each position so that industry perspectives are clearly communicated during task-force deliberations and on the conference floor.

This is one of the most important opportunities our industry has to identify potential impacts and help shape policy before formal deliberations begin. The strength of our positions depends on the operational knowledge that only you can bring to the discussions. The diversity of our industry makes it difficult to write one-size-fits-all regulations, which is why we need broad participation.

What to expect: We will be in touch with the broader membership shortly to share the review schedule and we will distribute proposals in advance, so you have time to evaluate them before each session. Please make sure your membership is current so you stay on our distribution list, watch your inbox, plan to join the calls that matter most to your operation, and consider attending the Biennial Meeting in Newport if you can.

Preparing to Walk the Hill

Policy is shaped in Washington as well as in the conference room. The board and I are developing a plan to make sure the ECSGA is well positioned to advocate effectively when opportunities arise, and specifically ahead of next spring's Walk the Hill event. Hearing directly from their constituents remains one of the most powerful ways to show lawmakers and their staff the value of our industry to coastal economies, working waterfronts, and healthy estuaries.

Walk the Hill is most effective when members from all up and down the coast take part. If you are interested in joining us, or have a story we should be telling about how federal policy affects your farm, please let me know. We will share dates, logistics, and talking points as planning advances.

Join or Renew Today: We Are Stronger Together

We are entering a period where the scale of national issues facing our industry calls, more than ever, for a strong association that can stay ahead of challenges and shape ideas to our benefit. That strength comes from you.

Membership in the ECSGA is an investment in the long-term health of your business. Much of what the association does happens before a problem ever reaches your farm: tracking regulatory changes as they surface, flagging proposals that would add cost or uncertainty, and making the case for practical, science-based alternatives.

As a member, you receive:

- ❑ **A seat at the regulatory table.** The ECSGA represents growers at the ISSC and with state and federal agencies, so the people writing the rules hear from those who have to follow them.
- ❑ **Early warning and a voice in shaping our positions.** Members see proposals and policy developments early and help decide where the association stands.
- ❑ **Advocacy in Washington.** We carry the industry's story to Congress and federal agencies on the issues that affect permitting, funding, markets, and working waterfronts.
- ❑ **A coastwide network.** You are connected to growers, researchers, and partners who have faced the same challenges you have and are working on the same solutions.

Just as important, your membership adds weight to every one of those efforts. When the ECSGA speaks, it speaks for growers from the East and Gulf Coasts, something no single farm can bring to the table alone.

If you have not yet renewed your ECSGA membership, I ask that you do so today. With the ISSC Biennial Meeting just three months away and Walk the Hill planning underway, the timing could not be more important.

Renewing now ensures that you will stay informed on the proposals under review, reflects your perspective in our positions, and gives the ECSGA the resources to advocate for you in Newport, in Washington, and wherever else decisions affecting your business are made. If you know colleagues who have not yet joined, please encourage them to reach out. They are stronger with us, and we are stronger with them. If you sign up after October 1 your membership will be good through 2027.

To join the ECSGA or renew your membership visit ecsga.org/join-ecsga or send an email to mason.ecsga@gmail.com

Thank you for your support. I look forward to working with you and to seeing many of you in Newport in January.

Join the ECSGA LISTSERV

Don't miss out on access to our primary conduit for delivering timely news, grant info, tips, answers to growers' questions and more.

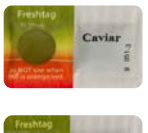
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Passing the Torch

by Robert B. Rheault, Shellfish Environmental Services, Wakefield, Rhode Island

In case you missed the news, on September 15 Chris Schillaci officially took the reins as the new executive director of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association! Chris has hit the ground running, so please direct all questions and concerns to him at, chris@ecsga.org. I have every confidence that Chris will be an excellent leader and will do a great job of keeping our association going strong in the years ahead.

Although I will no longer have any administrative duties, I am not completely retiring. I will attend the biennial meeting of the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) in January as a member of the association, but not as its leader. I will continue to engage with the industry as an independent consultant, and will work with the ECSGA during our political advocacy efforts to ensure that Chris gets a proper introduction to our congressional allies in D.C.

Over the past 22 years, I have found great fulfillment in supporting and advocating for this association's members. I have been proud to support hard-working people with a strong environmental ethic and love of working on the water as they produce delicious, nutritious, and sustainable seafood.



ANN KANE RHEAULT/ECSGA

On September 17, 2026, Bob Rheault (center) received the "2026 Prince of Tides" award from Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association President Kyle Lentz and Executive Director Margaret Pilaro at the PCSGA annual meeting in Blaine, Washington. The prestigious award recognized Rheault's commitment and contributions to the PCSGA and cited him "as one of the most steadfast champions our industry has ever known, [who] fused a farmer's experience with a scientist's rigor into a credible and respected voice."

Since its founding, the ECSGA has collaborated closely with the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association (PCSGA), National Aquaculture Association (NAA), and many esteemed academic and extension partners to advance the industry. During my tenure, we've experienced amazing growth in production and witnessed the emergence of an array of innovative growing equipment. We have overcome the challenges of a pandemic and battled relentless media attacks. We've had some notable political and regulatory successes, including:

1. preventing implementation of some potentially disastrous regulatory proposals at the ISSC
2. fending off the proposed introduction of *Crassostrea ariakensis* in the Chesapeake
3. tackling issues such as interstate shellfish seed transport
4. building an oyster-breeding program that we hope will yield improved disease resistance and faster-growing oysters
5. improving access to federal crop disaster insurance, and gaining an aquaculture exemption for expensive Jones Act Insurance
6. procuring a large marketing grant (soon-to-be announced) that will help build new markets and sustain continued production increases across the nation

I have made it a personal focus of my career to document the ecosystem services rendered by our farms and our crops. With the help of many academic scientists we have gathered vast amounts of scientific evidence to document the benefits of shellfish on water quality and habitat. With the help of our web master (my lovely wife, Ann) we have assembled rafts of information for growers to help them navigate regulatory mazes, improve farming practices and inform growers on everything from extension resources, to training programs and tips on marketing.

Many challenges remain, including overcoming future regulatory hurdles, addressing social-carrying-capacity concerns, and dealing with a changing climate. By collaborating with our allies, I expect we will continue to expand production and strengthen our markets. Our industry produces exceptional products that are unparalleled in quality, and it's supported by growers

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Meet The Great Marsh Shellfish Company, Oyster Growers in Massachusetts

by NOAA Fisheries

When you farm shellfish on Massachusetts' beautiful coastal marshes, the world is your oy-stah! At least according to Brenden Doyle, a Gloucester native with family roots in Massachusetts' commercial and recreational fishing industry. He spent his childhood boating and fishing around Cape Ann and learning about the unique ecology that defines the North Shore.

His love of the sea led him to his first career with the U.S. Navy. While he later worked in IT, he always wanted to find a way to work on the water again. Inspired by family members who farm scallops and salmon in Nova Scotia, he purchased a 3.8-acre section of marshy wetland in 2018. After 3½ years, he secured permits and started The Great Marsh Shellfish Company.

The company operates in the heart of the Great Marsh, the largest contiguous salt marsh in New England. It has more than 25,000 acres of pristine waters that offer rich tidal waters for oysters. The farm sits at the mouth of the Rowley River, which provides critical nutrients for oysters and muddy flats for oyster cages.

Farming Oysters from Tide to Table

The Great Marsh Shellfish Company's oysters grow in an incredibly productive environment. Oysters, like wine grapes, develop their flavor profile from where they are grown. They offer a unique taste of the place. The salinity of the Rowley River estuary, abundant algae, and marsh grasses create the distinctive flavor profile. Brenden describes his oysters as brine-forward and sweet, with a bright grassy aftertaste.

The oyster seeds are sourced from hatcheries in Maine. At 2 millimeters long, oysters start in the farm's specialized nursery and move through a series of grow-out equipment to condition their shells. Throughout the process, oysters are handled often to develop the deep cups ideal for shucking. This intricate process of moving each individual oyster through these stages is incredibly labor intensive. This year, Brenden's team will hand sort more than 1 million oysters. All this hard work pays off in high-quality oysters for the market.

After their final tumble at the farm, the oysters are sold to wholesalers who bring them to local bars, restaurants, and grocery stores. Brenden and his team hand-pick every oyster, guaranteeing quality in every slurp.



THE GREAT MARSH SHELLFISH COMPANY

Brenden Doyle, founder and owner of The Great Marsh Shellfish Company, grows oysters in the largest contiguous salt marsh in New England.

Working in harmony with the marsh, the team's schedule is dictated by environmental conditions. "We are often working on tide time," Brenden explains. "At low tide, we are working our bottom culture and oyster seed nursery; at high tides, we are tumbling and sorting larger oysters to maintain optimal density in our cages."

Oyster farming, however, isn't without its challenges. Brenden describes, "It's not all shucking oysters and wading in the water. It's fighting with boat engines, splicing broken lines, scrubbing mud and keeping mussels and barnacles off our oysters and gear." He notes that his dedicated team makes it all possible. "Working as a member of the crew requires both skills and heart. The skills can be taught, but you can't teach the heart."

Despite the demanding conditions, Brenden is committed to his work. Looking ahead, he hopes to expand operations to include quahogs, soft shell clams, razor clams, scallops, and even seaweed. The goal is to create a diverse, resilient farm to contribute to local and sustainable food systems.

Commitment to Sustainability and Community

Brenden is committed to running his business in a way that promotes environmental stewardship and community

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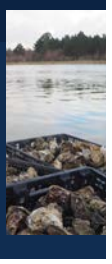
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EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWERS ASSOCIATION

The East Coast Shellfish Growers Association represents more than 2,000 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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USDA ARS Eastern Oyster Research Benefits Stakeholders

by Dina Proestou, Research Geneticist, USDA ARS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) East Coast Shellfish Genetics Laboratory was established in June 2013. Our main labs are located at the University of Rhode Island's Kingston campus, but we also conduct experimental work at the Narragansett Bay campus and operate a small research hatchery in East Matunuck, Rhode Island. We are part of the National Cold Water Marine Aquaculture Center, headquartered in Orono, Maine. The primary mission of ARS laboratories across the country is to find scientific solutions to agriculture challenges and pass them on to producers, industry representatives, and communities. Research objectives are informed by stakeholder priorities.

Since its inception, the East Coast Shellfish Genetics Laboratory has supported the eastern oyster aquaculture industry by performing research focused on genetic improvement. We have developed several tools to advance breeding for commercially important traits. Because dermo disease is cited as a primary concern for growers, we optimized a challenge model and partnered with the Aquaculture Genetics and Breeding Technology Center at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to characterize dermo resistance phenotypes and quantify the extent of genetic variation for the traits within their breeding population. This information is needed to enable targeted selection. We also used transcriptomics to better understand



DINA PROESTOU/USDA ARS

Research geneticist Andrew Griffith and ORISE fellow Mary Sullivan phenotyping 2025 oyster seed at the Marine Science Research Facility, University of Rhode Island Narragansett Bay Campus. The East Coast Shellfish Genetics Laboratory has supported the eastern oyster aquaculture industry by doing research focused on genetic improvement, and has developed several tools to advance breeding for commercially important traits.

dermo-oyster interactions over the course of infection, and identified molecular pathways specific to dermo-resistant and tolerant phenotypes. These pathways are being evaluated as potential biomarkers to accelerate genetic improvement.

In collaboration with the Eastern Oyster Genome and Breeding Consortia, USDA ARS contributed to the publication of a high-quality reference genome assembly for eastern oyster and the subsequent construction of a high-density genotyping array. While these tools do not have a direct application for industry, they have broad utility

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Great Marsh Shellfish Company

well-being. The oysters naturally enhance water quality by removing excess nutrients as they filter feed. Additionally, the farm's use of floating gear reduces boat wake, protecting shorelines from erosion.

Beyond its environmental contributions, the farm plays a vital role in the local economy. It provides employment opportunities for residents, boosting the North Shore economy.



THE GREAT MARSH SHELLFISH COMPANY

The rivers, bays, and estuaries of the Great Marsh provide an ideal habitat for shellfish farming.

The company is a key player in aquaculture research, collaborating with educational and environmental organizations on studies ranging from predator interactions and water quality to oyster genetics and ecology. For example, Brenden is partnering with Northeastern University and the University of Maine to enhance clam larvae recruitment and protect them from green crabs. In a region with a rich history of soft-shell clam harvesting, this will ultimately contribute to the reseeding of native clam flats.

His consistent engagement within the North Shore aquaculture community is instrumental in cultivating a sustainable future for the industry. As Brenden puts it, "The act of growing oysters isn't just about the oysters themselves. It's about creating something that benefits the environment, supports our community, and provides high-quality food for the future."

Fun Fact

The farm is providing the first commercially available oysters from the Great Marsh in more than 200 years. Oyster populations were overfished historically in this area. While recent efforts to restore oyster reefs are helping sustain wild populations, they can't currently sustain a wild oyster fishery. By farming oysters, The Great Marsh Shellfish Company gives people the opportunity to enjoy oysters grown in the unique environment of the Great Marsh once more.



THE GREAT MARSH SHELLFISH COMPANY

While the team at The Great Marsh Shellfish Company agrees the best way to eat an oyster is fresh at the farm, their grilled oysters come in a close second.

Grilled Oysters with Harissa Garlic Butter

1. Blend ¼ cup (half stick) of softened butter with 2 tablespoons of harissa paste and 1 minced garlic clove.

2. On each shucked oyster top with 1 teaspoon of butter blend and place over a flaming hot grill.

3. Once the butter is bubbling like molten lava, remove from the grill, let cool slightly, and enjoy!



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Passing the Torch

who are both determined and resilient.

With your support, the ECSGA board, led by Executive Director Chris Schillaci, will keep working to meet the many challenges that lie ahead.

Note: I encourage all our members to participate in the ISSC biennial meeting to be held January 24-29, 2027, at the Newport Harbor Island Resort in Newport, Rhode Island. (Visit ISSC.org to become a member) Our industry is unique because our members have a voice in shaping the regulatory process. We have a duty to ensure that we can continue to produce safe shellfish without risking the viability of our businesses. This is your chance to have a role in shaping a practical and fair regulatory environment. Our markets depend on safe products, and our economic viability relies on practical and affordable regulatory approaches.

The Growing Impact of Maine Aquaculture: The Rise of Shellfish

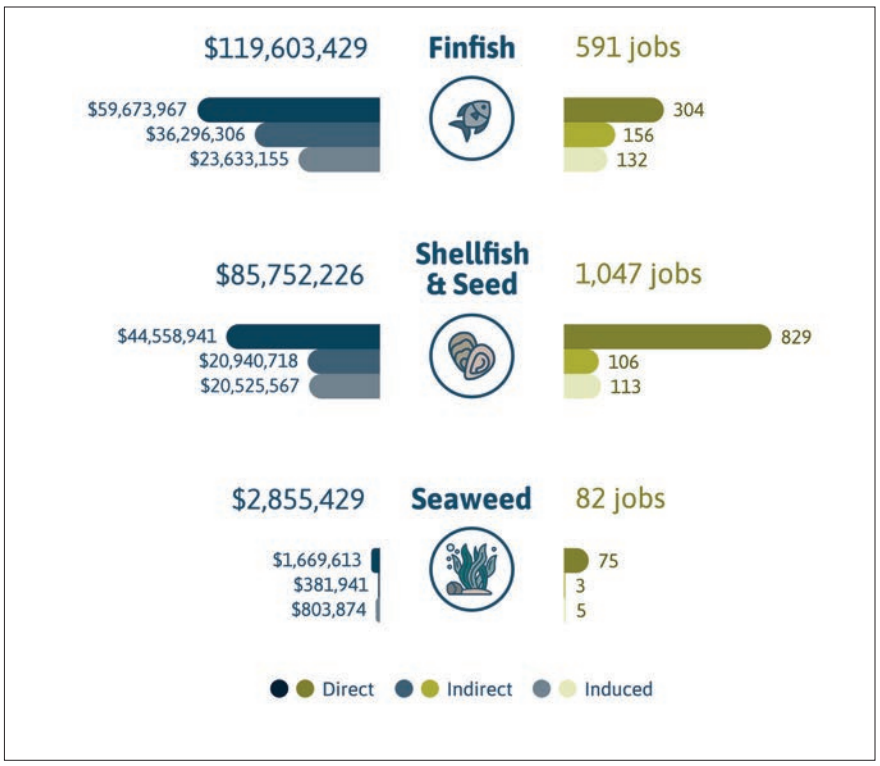
by Christian Brayden, Project Manager,
Maine Aquaculture Association, Gardiner, Maine

Farmers have practiced aquaculture in Maine for over a century, but its objectives were largely rooted in wild-stock enhancement for clams and finfish, and it received little public attention. Recently the state's growing shellfish sector has stepped into the spotlight after making notable gains in sales, employment, and entrepreneurship. Aquatic farming has grown into one of the leading drivers of Maine's small-business-led seafood scene, and that growth remains steady. According to a new economic study by the Maine Aquaculture Association, $105.9 million in aquaculture sales were reported in 2023, compared to $73.4 million in 2014—an increase of 44%.

Each dollar generated through Maine aquaculture activities yields nearly an additional dollar of economic activity across the state, leading the sector's total statewide contribution to $208 million, and contributing to 400 industries. Aquaculture in Maine is led by finfish (e.g., salmon, trout)—the second-most valuable fishery in the state following lobster—and is followed by shellfish (e.g., oysters, mussels, and scallops) and seaweed (e.g., sugar kelp), among other species. Having grown from a handful of mostly part-time businesses to a recognized sector with staying power that helps employ over 1,700 people statewide, sea farming has become a pillar of Maine's working waterfronts, tourism economy, and coastal culture.

The Maine Aquaculture Association partnered with the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center, Atlantic Corporation, Texas A&M University, and Mississippi State University to produce the newest Maine Aquaculture Economic Contribution Report and accompanying Sector Survey Report, which studies the sector's growth from 2014 to 2023 and shows its contributions to Maine's sea-farming businesses, employees, and communities. From 2014 to 2023 the value of Maine aquaculture landings grew at an average rate of around 5%. Much of this growth was led by the shellfish and seed sector, which more than tripled. In 2023, Maine's shellfish and seed sector contributed over $44 million in direct sales, which led to an additional indirect contribution of $21 million and $20 million in induced contributions, for a total contribution of $86 million. This includes over 1,000 jobs, most of which are full-time, year-round positions, even before accounting for the economic activity tied to the booming aquaculture-related tourism sector.

The growth was driven by small shellfish farmers just starting out; 79% of Maine's aquaculture farmers have been in business for fewer than 10 years, and have yet to reach their break-even point. As such, these early- and middle-stage businesses are expanding, with 77% of them expecting to increase sales by 2030 with a median anticipated growth of 75%. The report shows that claims from opposition groups that Maine's aquaculture sector is large-scale and industrialized could not be further from the truth: 83% of Maine's farmers held under 20 leased acres, with many closer to 5 acres.



JACK SULLIVAN/MAINE AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION

The rise in aquaculture, as reflected in the growth of individual aquaculture farms along the coast of Maine, arrives at an inflection point in the state's demographic, environmental, and economic trends. An aging workforce, coastal gentrification, and shifting populations of wild-harvest species are all challenges that Maine's marine economy must reckon with. Aquaculture has brought revitalized energy, entrepreneurship, and a stronger workforce to Maine's working waterfronts—particularly through programs such as Aquaculture in Shared Waters and the Maine Aquaculture Registered Apprenticeship Program.

Aquaculture is building excitement and businesses, while providing hope and diversification throughout Maine. It is bringing in young people, from nearby and wicked far, who want to build careers and launch their own businesses in aquaculture.

—Continued on page 20



NSF Awards $15 Million To Strengthen Fisheries and Aquaculture in New England

In July 2026, the National Science Foundation announced the NSF Seafood Engine, a new Regional Innovation Engine meant to revitalize New England's seafood industry through technology. The Northeastern Regional Association of Coastal Ocean Observing Systems (NERACOOS), based in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, leads the Engine. It unites more than 50 partners from industry, research, government, and the tech sector across Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island.



The Engine will receive $15 million over its first two years, and funding could grow to $160 million over a decade. During that time it aims to increase the volume, quality, and value of regional seafood; strengthen coastal communities; improve food security; and help close the U.S. seafood trade deficit of more than $20 billion. New England already produces about a quarter of the nation's seafood value.

The work will employ three strategies:

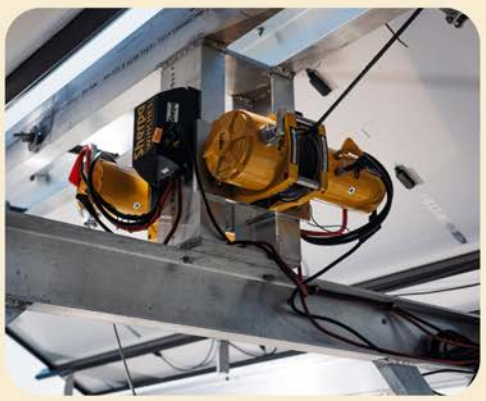
1. Research and development projects will pair harvesters and aquaculture farms with researchers and tech companies to collect ocean data from sensors on fishing vessels and farms.
2. A consortium of apprenticeship programs will train the next generation of seafood workers.
3. Translation funding will help blue-tech companies bring proven innovations to market.

Partners are already taking on specific roles. The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution will deploy autonomous underwater vehicles from fishing boats and develop robotic aquaculture tools with the University of New Hampshire and the University of Rhode Island. The Gulf of Maine Research Institute will co-lead efforts in Maine.

The Seafood Engine was one of 12 winners chosen from nearly 300 initial applicants.

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—Continued from page 7

Eastern Oyster Research Benefits Stakeholders

within the oyster research and breeding communities. Specifically, they enable discrimination among distinct oyster lines used by industry, promote the study of evolutionary responses to environmental change, and facilitate explorations into the genetic basis for commercially important traits. Results of these studies and others will ultimately benefit industry by informing genome-based breeding approaches that are faster and more accurate than traditional methods.

ARS has also performed several multi-year, multi-site field evaluations of distinct wild, research, and commercial eastern oyster lines to identify superior performers and assess the need for region-specific breeding programs. These studies demonstrated significant differences in growth, survival, and yield among lines at each site. Moreover, lines tended to perform sub-optimally outside their site of origin, and no one line performed best at all sites. Taken together, our results highlight the challenges associated with creating oyster lines that perform consistently across heterogeneous environments and inform the structure of future breeding programs.



DINA PROESTOU/USDA ARS

USDA ARS and NOAA Milford staff counting 2025 seed deployed at a partner oyster farm.

Recent increases in funding have allowed for the expansion of the ARS East Coast Shellfish Genetics Laboratory to include expertise in quantitative genetics and shellfish physiology. We are in the early stages of building a Northeast-specific eastern oyster breeding program that will generate improved broodstock for hatcheries and growers in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York. We have forged strong collaborations with the Darling Marine Center at the University of Maine and the NOAA Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Milford, Connecticut, to increase hatchery capacity. The Northeast Oyster Breeding Center has been established through an interagency agreement with NOAA. We also have partnerships with commercial growers in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut to support the grow-out and field evaluation of our emergent lines. The creation of our founding population is near complete, and we aim to begin genetic improvement in 2028.

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Where Was Your Cage Made?

Built to last: why the oyster industry still needs American manufacturing

by Heather Ketcham, Ketcham Supply, New Bedford, Massachusetts

We started building welded wire lobster traps at Ketcham Supply in New Bedford back in 1975. Then when shellfish aquaculture took off in New England, we put the same manufacturing know-how into oyster cages and trays, developing them with input from growers working every kind of bottom and tide condition.

Massachusetts has about 1,400 acres of shellfish farms, and farmed oysters are the third-highest-value seafood product in the state. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) the U.S. farmed-oyster market accounts for roughly $327 million a year.

Gear is a real line item in that number. A cage that lasts an extra two seasons gives you more time spent growing oysters instead of fixing equipment, and it changes the math on the whole farm.

The cost of a cage is not the price of a cage

Price is what you pay in March. Cost is what the cage does over the next eight or 10 years.

Wire quality, coating consistency and weld integrity all show up in that number. So does downtime, and whether you can still buy a replacement panel in five years. Pulling gear in the middle of a harvest to repair it is the expensive part, not the cage.

Wire is where cages fail

Corrosion almost never starts across a whole cage at once. It starts at the welds, where the coating is thinnest or already broken.

That is the difference between pre-galvanized wire and galvanized after welding. Pre-galvanized wire is coated first and then welded, which burns the zinc off at every intersection. Galvanized after welding is welded first and then dipped in molten zinc, so every wire and every weld gets a continuous coat.

At Ketcham Supply we build with Riverdale Mills Aquamesh®, made in Northbridge, Massachusetts. Engineered by Riverdale in the late 1970s as an alternative to wooden lobster traps, Aquamesh® is galvanized after welding and then coated with an adhesive layer and a marine grade polymer. It was built for saltwater from the start.

Where gear was made is a fair question to ask

A lot of aquaculture gear sold in this country is now made overseas or with imported wire. Although that does not automatically imply that it's bad gear, it does mean you often cannot find out what the wire is, who welded it, or whether the same product will exist next season.

We make our cages here in the U.S., we buy our wire here, and we have our floats manufactured here. When a panel fails you can call us and we will make a new panel for you. When you expand the farm in three years the new cages will match the old ones. When something is not working right, you talk to the people who built it.

The questions worth asking

Before you buy your next set of cages, ask whoever is selling them:

- ❑ Where was the wire made?
- ❑ Was it galvanized before or after welding?
- ❑ Will replacement panels and components still be available in five years?
- ❑ Who do you call when something goes wrong?

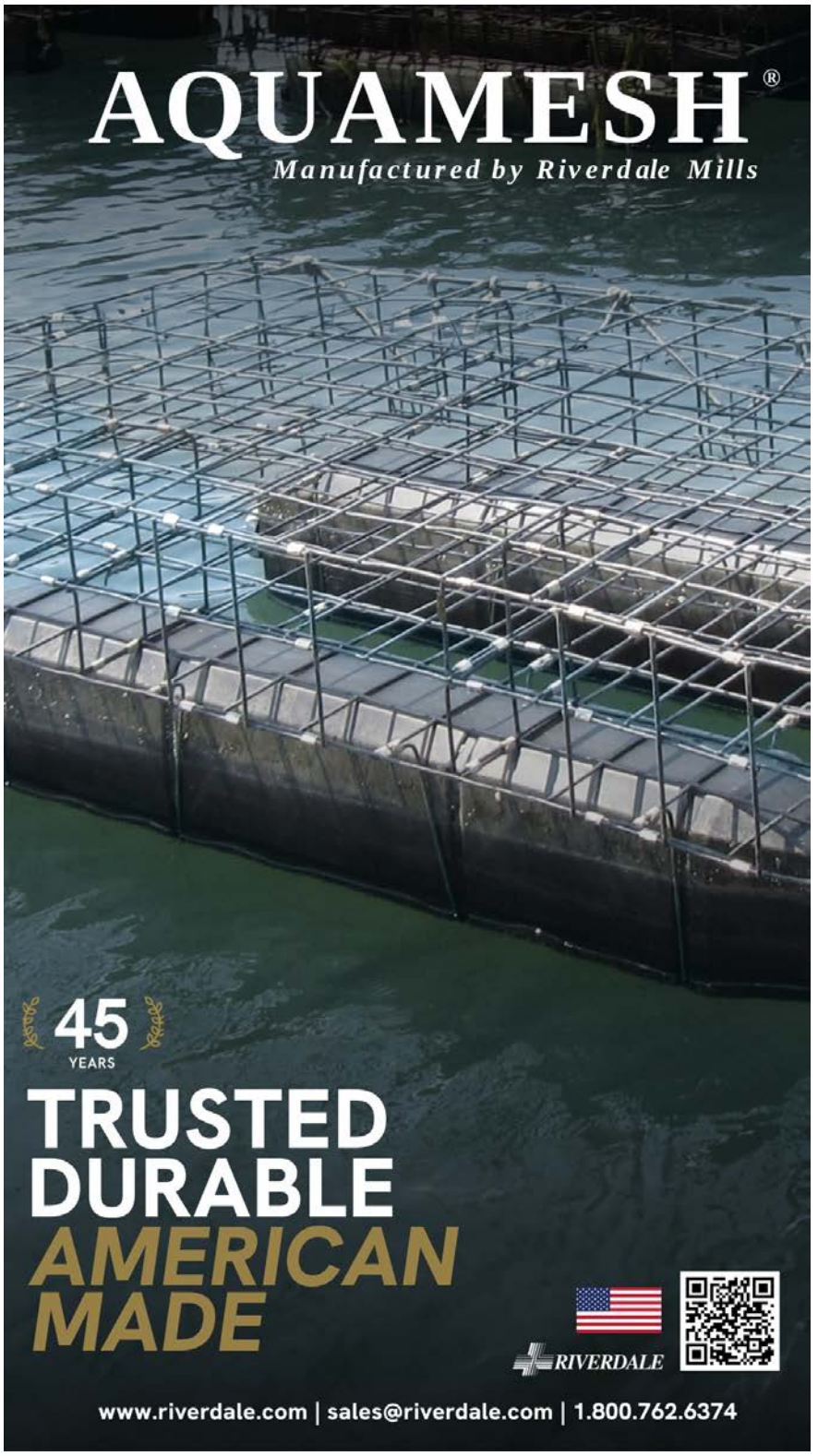
Those four answers set your maintenance schedule and your replacement cycle. And they matter a whole lot more than the number on the quote.

For more information on aquaculture gear manufactured and sold through Ketcham Supply, visit the company's aquaculture collection at [ketchamsupply.com/collections/aquaculture.](ketchamsupply.com/collections/aquaculture)



KETCHAM SUPPLY

Ketcham Supply makes bottom cages using 4.5" mesh made of heavy-duty, 8-gauge, marine-grade, vinyl-coated wire from Riverdale Mills in Massachusetts. The cages are manufactured in Ketcham's New Bedford, Massachusetts, facility.



Senate Passes the Making America's Food Safer Act

Two of ECSGA's top legislative priorities take a major step forward

by Christopher Schillaci
ECSGA Executive Director

ECSGA members have a win to celebrate. On Monday, September 28, 2026, the U.S. Senate passed the Making America's Food Safer Act (S. 4974), a bill that brings together two of our top legislative priorities.

Legislative wins usually take years. This one didn't. The ECSGA started this push only this past winter, working with allies in the Gulf shrimp industry, the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association, and others. Less than a year later, the bill has cleared the full Senate.

What's in the bill

- ❑ The Destruction of Hazardous Imports Act (H.R. 2715) gives the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to destroy refused imported food that poses a health hazard, instead of allowing it to be sent back out and potentially re-routed into U.S. commerce.
- ❑ The Federal and State Food Safety Information Sharing Act (H.R. 8430) improves how the FDA and state regulators share food safety information. Limits on the FDA's ability to share information with states came to light during last year's investigation of the *Salmonella Telelkebir* illness cluster.

Neither idea is new. Both echo priorities that have been on the FDA's own legislative wish list for several years. The bill cleared the Senate HELP Committee this summer by a unanimous 22–0 vote, and the House has already passed H.R. 2715 on its own. The next step is for the House to act on the Senate-passed version.

Why it matters: stopping bad product at the border

Domestic shellfish growers operate under some of the strictest sanitation standards in the food system. Imported shellfish that doesn't meet those standards puts consumers at risk, and when it makes people sick, the whole industry pays. Outbreaks rarely make clear the distinction between imported and domestic product, and markets react to the headlines. Intercepting and blocking substandard imports before they reach consumers is one of the most important things we can do to protect public health and the markets our members depend on.

A recent case shows exactly what's at stake. This summer, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) linked a hepatitis A outbreak that sickened 37 people to blood ark clams imported from South America. The exporting country has no equivalency agreement with the FDA to ship raw molluscan shellfish to the United States.

The first alerts about the outbreak didn't mention that the clams were imported. When the ECSGA contacted the author and asked that the headline be corrected, he responded quickly, but by then a half-dozen news outlets had already run the story. Consumers were left with the impression that clams in general were unsafe, and domestic growers who had nothing to do with the illnesses paid the price.

As food safety attorney Bill Marler has since explained on his blog, shipping from a country without an FDA shellfish agreement does not, by itself, make an import unlawful under current federal law. Prosecutors have other tools they can use against the people who moved the product, but the gap remains: shellfish raised in unsanitary conditions can still reach American consumers and damage the reputation of our industry.



FLORIAN PINTAR/UNSPLASH

The Senate has passed the Making America's Food Safer Act, which could help with the problem of imported shellfish that doesn't meet FDA sanitation standards making people sick.

S. 4974 is an important step toward closing those gaps, but it won't be the last one. The ECSGA is also looking at what regulatory changes would be needed to treat raw shellfish from countries without an equivalency agreement as unlawful imports, and we will keep pressing on this issue.

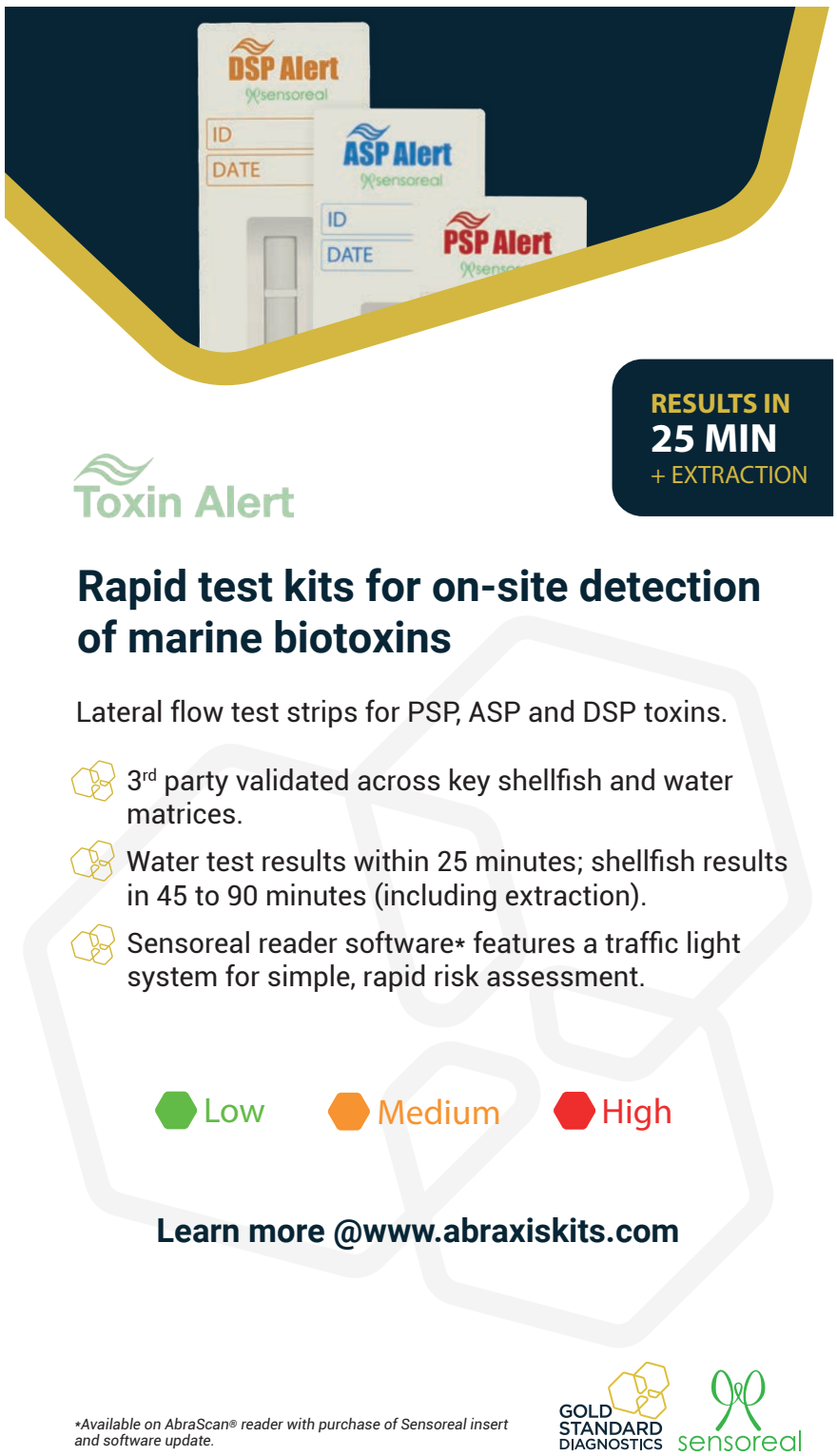
Thank you

Special thanks to Bob Rheault, who led this effort for the association during his tenure as executive director, and to our partners in the Gulf shrimp industry, at the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association, and beyond. We are also grateful to Sen. Ed Markey's office, Sen. Tim Kaine's office, and to the HELP Committee staff for their support in moving the bill forward.

How you can help

If you have a relationship with your congressional representative, now is the time to ask them to support H.R. 8430 when it comes to the House floor. And if you hear of any member of Congress with reservations about the bill, please let me know at chris@ecsga.org.

Protecting consumers and the reputation of domestic shellfish is important work, and it isn't simple. It's one more reason your support of the ECSGA matters. Thank you for being part of it.



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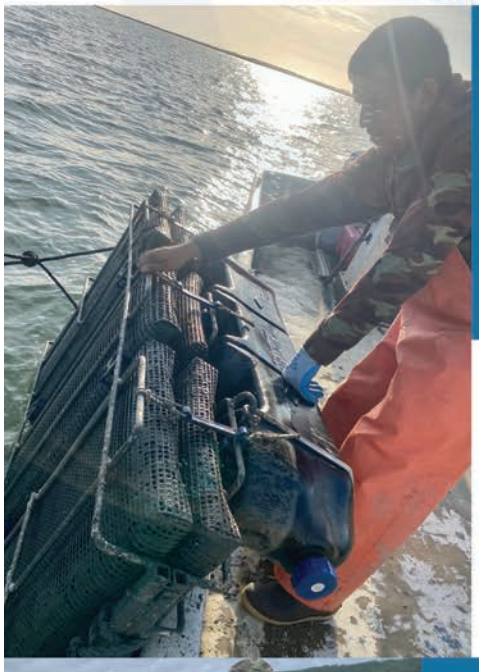
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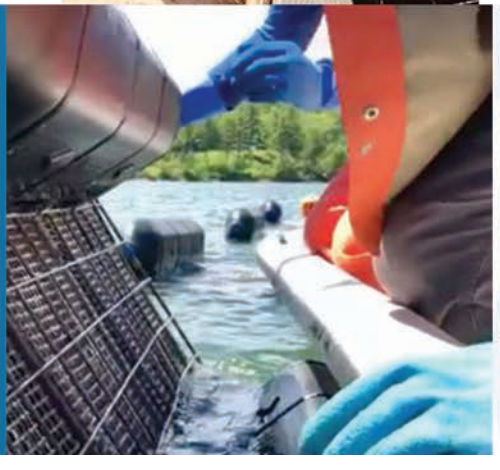
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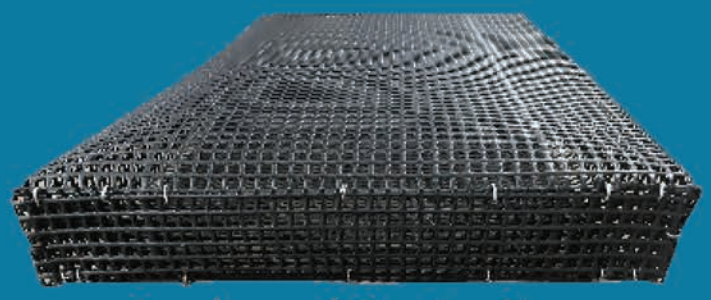
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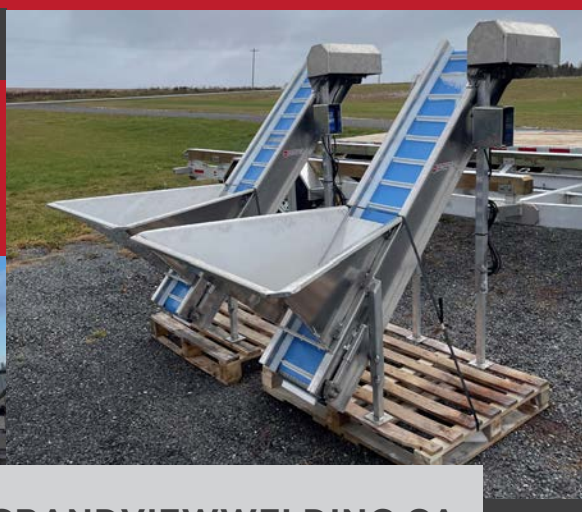
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We Are Stronger Together

by Robert B. Rheault,
Shellfish Environmental Services,
Wakefield, Rhode Island

The motto of the National Aquaculture Association (NAA) is "Stronger Together." Working with others who share many of the same goals certainly helps to build strong bonds. This paid off a few weeks ago when the British online newspaper Independent ran an inflammatory article on flesh-eating bacteria in the Gulf of Mexico. The headline read, "Eighth person dies from flesh-eating bacteria linked to oysters in US." However, the body of the story clearly stated, "'All nine cases reported this year were associated with wounds exposed to seawater, and all patients had underlying health conditions,' Louisiana's Department of Health reported earlier this month."

I shared the article with NAA's Director of Membership and Marketing Maria Smithson, who reached out to Independent's editor and author. Amazingly, they changed the headline to, "Eighth person dies from flesh-eating bacteria in Gulf Coast states," and offered the following strong correction: "This article was amended on 27 August 2026. The original headline stated that an eighth person died from flesh-eating bacteria linked to oysters in the United States in 2026. There is no evidence that the deaths are linked to contaminated oysters."

So many times in recent years media outlets have run click-bait articles about deaths due to flesh-eating bacteria caused by wound infections, yet felt compelled to mention oysters, admonishing consumers to cook them fully, often with pictures of shucked oysters taken off the web. Wound infections have nothing to do with oyster consumption (unless you happen to cut yourself on an oyster).

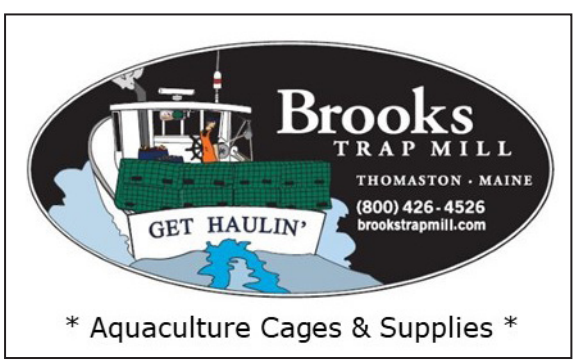
Although bad-mouthing oysters when reporting on wound infections may constitute journalistic malpractice, it is nonetheless frustratingly common. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) attributes 60-65% of *Vibrio vulnificus* illnesses to wound infections, while seafood consumption is linked to only about 16% of the 150-175 *V.v.* illnesses counted annually in the U.S. Last year we managed to get the CDC to remove the picture of oysters from their web page on *Vibrio* wound infections, but their web page on Vibrios still lists raw and undercooked shellfish as a primary vector because of the association with *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*.

When three crabbers in Delaware Bay were infected about five years ago, more than 40 articles mentioning oysters were generated. When three swimmers in Long Island Sound died from infected wounds in 2023, I counted 90 articles published, and responded to at least half of them without getting a single response in return. Smithson's success in getting the Independent headline modified, along with a correction, gives me renewed hope that complaining to editors and authors can have an impact. In the long run we can hope that they learn to reach out to us for comment before they slander our industry.

The ECSGA has long worked together with the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association (PCSGA) and the NAA. We communicate regularly and have members who sit on each other's committees and even work together on legislative priorities in D.C. Many shellfish growers are also Farm Bureau members and, even though we may not be 100% aligned on all issues, we can set aside our differences to get things done. The Farm Bureau is one of the biggest lobbying groups in D.C., and it wields political clout we can only dream of. They helped us get the Jones Act exemption for aquaculture passed, and they have worked with us on numerous other issues. While the Farm Bureau may have positions on pesticides, fertilizer use, and water quality that can run counter to ours, we are willing to set aside those differences so we can work together on shared objectives.

I am often surprised when I hear a member say they are not going to pay dues anymore because they disagree with one of our positions, or with a comment I have made. Often, they will temper their criticism with praise for the ECSGA as a whole and note how the association is a force for good in the industry. While I rarely find a politician I agree with on 100% of the issues, I still will vote for those who share most of my views, even if there are things we do not agree on. The ECSGA is a membership-based group, and even though you may not support everything the association says or does, I hope you will support it because, on balance, I believe it does good work for the community writ large.







Coming Events

Financing Your Shellfish Aquaculture Business. Nov. 17. 6:30pm. Webinar. Visit docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfFu8oVCwjv5zwaYzCCQca6E6sxA_whO0I-zoge1uRW-9bY_kw/viewform.

Carbon-Neutral Sea Farm Technology. Dec. 8. Webinar hosted by Shred Electric. Visit cornell.zoom.us/meeting/register/hbFUu5DrSRa_AXHZCt-qKg#/registration.

Milford Aquaculture Seminar. Jan. 11–13. Conference. Courtyard by Marriott, Shelton, CT. Visit fisheries.noaa.gov/new-england-mid-atlantic/aquaculture/milford-aquaculture-seminar.

2027 East Coast Commercial Fishermen's and Aquaculture Expo. Jan. 15–16. Trade show. Powell Convention Center, Ocean City, MD. Visit marylandwatermen.com/events.

Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference. Jan. 24–29. Biennial meeting. Newport Harbor Island Resort, Newport, RI. Visit issc.org/2027-issc-biennial-meeting.

Aquaculture America. Feb. 21–24. Conference and trade show. Hawaii Convention Center, Hololulu, HI. Visit was.org/meeting/code/AA2027.

Oyster South. March 4–6. Symposium and trade show. Wilmington, NC. Visit www.oystersouth.com.





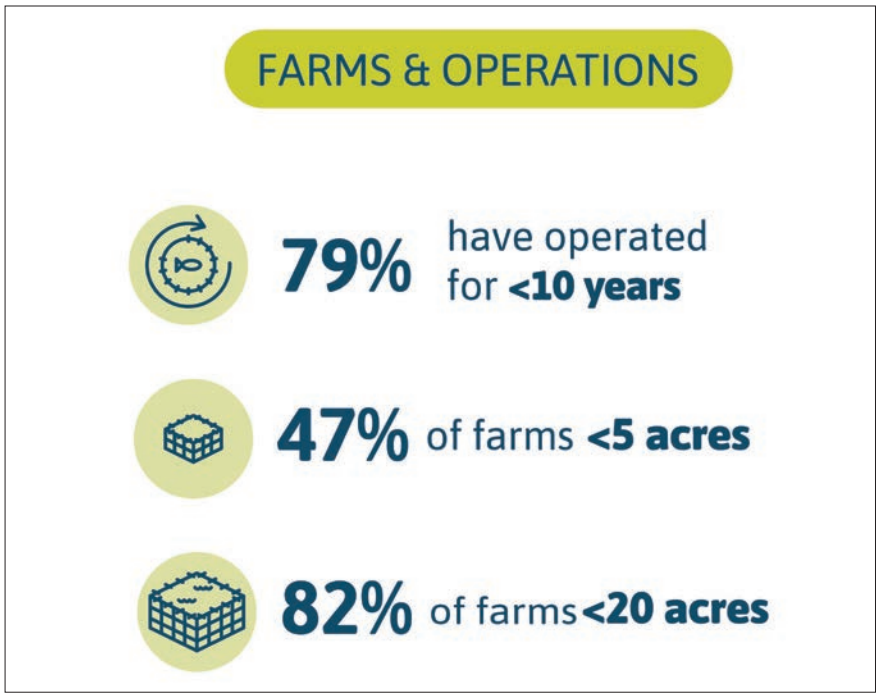
—Continued from page 9

Economic Impact of Maine Aquaculture

While some see it as a supplement to their current commercial fishing activities, others who want to work on the water view it as a way to sidestep the barriers to entering the commercial fishing industry.

The largest segment of the aquaculture workforce is now under 35, and owners and workers who identify as women or non-binary comprise 29% and 24% of the sector, respectively—more than 4 times higher than what is found in U.S. commercial fisheries (Posadas, 2025).

The recent growth in the Maine aquaculture sector has been led by the small, growing businesses and entrepreneurs who make up the shellfish sector. Maine's shellfish business owners and workers are driven, resourceful people who are taking advantage of training courses and investing their time and energy to improve their farms, their careers, and their livelihoods along Maine's coast. They are driving the growth of the sector, and the benefits that the state reaps from it, and continue to do so every day.



JACK SULLIVAN/MAINE AQUACULTURE ASSOCIATION



ECSGA Dues Categories

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 1 million	$1,000
Grower	$1 million to $3 million	$2,000
Grower	over $3 million	$3,000
Shellfish Dealers and Equipment Suppliers		$250
Restaurant Ally		$100
Non-voting Associate		$50

Why Should I Join the ECSGA?

When you become a member of the ECSGA you are making an investment in the long-term health of your business. Much of what the association does happens before a problem ever reaches your farm: we are tracking regulatory changes as they surface, flagging proposals that would add cost or uncertainty to your business, and making the case for practical, science-based alternatives.

When you become a member, you will:

- ❑ have a voice in shaping our positions and policies
- ❑ be supporting our advocacy efforts in Washington, where we carry the industry's stories to Congress and federal agencies on issues affecting permitting, funding, markets, and working waterfronts
- ❑ be connected to a coastwide network of growers, researchers, and partners who have grappled with the same challenges that you may be facing and who are working toward finding solutions

FISH AND SHELLFISH PACKAGING SPECIALISTS

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Pacific Packaging Products Inc., in partnership with Disruptive Packaging, is revolutionizing the seafood industry with URTHCOR®—a reusable and sustainable packaging solution that replaces polystyrene and waxed cardboard.

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