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Florida Clam Growers “Romance the Clam” at Savannah Event

“Romancing the Clam” was held this past spring on beautiful Chippewa Square in the historic city of Savannah, Georgia. This promotional event, sponsored by the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association, featured nine professional chefs from across the country (MA, NY, NJ, VA, SC, GA, FL and WA). The chefs demonstrated their favorite regional recipes using clams (manilas, hard, and geoducks) cultured by shellfish growers in their respective states. Florida was represented by Chef Peter Stefani from The Island Room in Cedar Key. Chef Stefani prepared two dishes—his signature clam dish, Florida Clams with Andouille Sausage and Plum Tomatoes, and a new dish, Florida Sunray Venus Clams with Citrus and Cilantro, created for the new shellfish aquaculture species being evaluated in Florida. Recipe cards were developed for all dishes. During the day, the chefs prepared their dishes in a filming session, and a tasting for the public was held that night. A DVD is currently being produced for seafood marketers to inspire their customers with gourmet clam recipes. An order form for the DVD can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

The event was developed to increase consumer awareness that farmed clams are rated as a “best food choice” by sustainability experts because they serve an important role in preserving healthy coastal waters, and are inexpensive, nutritious and delicious.

Along with the cooking demonstrations, the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association hosted a raw bar with hard clams from Massachusetts to Florida. The University of Florida facilitated a professional tasting of raw clams from the different growing regions. Attendees tasted for themselves and received an evaluation form to complete. They then compared their results with those of a trained sensory panel. For more information on the UF sensory evaluation of hard clams, see page 5 of this newsletter. Florida clams were awarded “Best Taste of the Sea” and rated well in briny and metallic aroma. However, this was not a competition, but rather an opportunity to show that clams, like oysters, may have different characteristics and flavors from one growing location to another. To top it off, a variety of delectable toppings, such as champagne vinegar, mignonette sauce, flying fish roe, citrus herb and gorgonzola, were introduced which enhanced the appeal and flavor of clams on the half shell.

Selected pictures of this event are on page 4. Additional information, including recipe cards, media coverage, sponsors and more pictures, is available at the website www.ECSGA.org, and the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association’s Facebook page.



El Niño Prediction for 2009-10: What does it mean and what to expect this upcoming year

The Climate Prediction Center of NOAA’s National Weather Service is predicting that the weak El Niño, which was present this summer, will continue to strengthen. A majority of the model forecasts suggest a moderate-to-strong El Niño in the Northern Hemisphere during 2009-2010. When an El Niño develops this early in summer (they usually form in the fall), Gulf of Mexico coastal areas should expect to receive more frequent thunderstorms. The recent heavy rains across North Florida have saturated soils and filled area lakes and rivers. According to the Southeast Climate Consortium, as seasons shift into the colder months El Niño affects the jet stream pattern that leads to frequent winter storms and frontal systems, cooler temperatures, and much above average rainfall. In December through March, El Niño typically leads to rainfall 40-50% greater than normal over the Florida peninsula. What does this mean for clam farmers? First, expect salinities to be below average in inshore coastal areas that are influenced by river discharge and runoff. If you know in advance that salinities may be low, plant seed next spring at less vulnerable lease areas or scale back your planting during that time. Harvest clams from at-risk leases. Next, continue to check on El Niño climate shifts in your particular county and review salinity information available at selected lease areas. Finally, sign-up for Farm Service Agency’s NAP coverage and, if eligible, the pilot crop insurance program.

Florida Clams Star on Television Programs

The Florida clam culture industry has been featured on both regional and national television programs this year.

Changing Seas is a twelve-part public television series produced by WPBT2 in Miami, Florida. This series takes viewers on an exciting adventure to the heart of our liquid planet. *Changing Seas* goes to the sea with explorers and scientists as they uncover information that could lead to scientific breakthroughs. Part of season one episodes, *Farming the Sea* (Episode 104) was aired in South Florida on June 30. In this episode, the viewer tours Florida aquaculture research facilities that are testing new methods for growing marine fish and replenishment of depleted wild populations. The clam farming industry in Cedar Key was also featured. Shawn Stephenson, Jon Gill, and Scotty Moots of Southern Cross and Bobby Witt were interviewed and explained how growing their product has little impact to the local ecosystems. To view the half-hour program online, go to http://changingseas.tv/episode_104.html.

Dirty Jobs is a popular television program aired on the Discovery Channel in which host Mike Rowe is shown performing difficult, strange, messy and sometimes disgusting occupational duties alongside typical employees. In August, Mike Rowe visited north Florida and met with clam farmers, Clayton Lewis, Bruce Skelton, and Chip Earl, at the Alligator Harbor Aquaculture Use Area in Franklin County. According to Clayton, "Mike had trouble securing the clam bags underwater during harvest, but he was able to hold his breath for a long time." Processing clams at St. Teresa Clams and a clam bake were also filmed. According to the producer, this segment should air sometime between December and March. Stay tuned!

Clam Marketing Tips

Here is an idea from the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association that costs next to nothing. Pick up a box of waterproof copy paper and print up a short half-page information piece about your product and farm. List the features that make your product special and what features set your product apart from the competition. Slide a copy in every box or bag of clams that goes out the door. It gives you an opportunity to deliver your sales pitch every week and remind the customer why they are buying your product. Restaurants like them because it helps coach the wait staff. Because they are waterproof, they survive the trip.

Also if you have not joined the Florida Agricultural Promotional Campaign, coordinated by the FDACS, do so now. The identification and promotional program is designed to boost the image of Florida's agriculture and aquaculture industries. Those participating in the program can use a distinctive logo, depicting a sun over land and water, with either the *Fresh from Florida* or *From Florida* recognition. Clams have their own individual logo!



NOTICE: Growers, please return data loggers to the UF Shellfish Aquaculture Extension Office. You will receive a graph of the water temperatures recorded at your lease as well as information comparing your measurements with those recorded at other lease sites.

Working Waterfronts Legislation in 2010

Florida Constitutional Amendment Number 6 was approved by over 70% of the state's voters in the 2008 general election. This new law allows "working waterfront" properties to be valued based on the character or current use of property instead of the real estate market (highest and best use). For qualifying properties, the current use valuation will likely result in a lower valuation of the property for the purposes of ad valorem taxation, and hence lower property taxes. In the 2009 Florida legislature session, both house and senate bills were introduced to establish further conditions for the assessment and refine the definition of qualifying properties. The aquaculture industry worked closely with Senator Charles Dean's office and was able to include aquaculture in the definition of eligible properties. This would allow water-dependent facilities (defined as operations of a facility requiring direct access to water), such as hatcheries, nurseries and clam processing plants, to be classified as working waterfront properties. However, the bills did not pass. Currently, both the House of Representatives and Senate sponsors are preparing to file bills as agreed upon at this past session's close for consideration in the 2010 legislative session. Although Constitutional Amendment No. 6 is to become effective January 1, 2010, it can not be implemented until legislative direction is passed. Contact your state legislators and let them know how important this is to your business.

Water Quality Monitoring Program Continues

During 2007-9 clam farmers in four coastal counties have been able to obtain "real-time" or archived information about water temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen and weather at or near their lease site by simply clicking onto a website, www.FloridaAquaculture.com. The University of Florida and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) Division of Aquaculture have recently entered into another three-year cooperative partnership agreement with the USDA CSREES and Risk Management Agency. This will provide funding through 2012 to operate and maintain stations located at the following lease areas: Dog Island and Gulf Jackson (Levy County), Horseshoe Beach (Dixie County), Indian River (Indian River County), and Alligator Harbor (Franklin County). In addition, the remote sensing equipment will be upgraded with this funding.



UF
IFAS



YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE!

Wednesday, October 14, 2009
Community Center (old Lion's Club)
809 6th Street, Cedar Key

10:30 AM–1:00 PM

Statewide Clam Industry Task Force

Agenda Items:

Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC) Issues,
Implementing Consent of Use for Aquaculture Docks,
Working Waterfronts Legislation, And more

1:00–1:30 PM

Lunch: Sponsored by Cedar Key Aquaculture Association

1:30–5:00 PM

Clam Industry Workshop

Project Updates:

Sensory Characteristics for Hard Clams from Massachusetts to Florida,
Results of Field Trials and Laboratory Challenges for Hybrid Clams,
Final Report on Ark Clam Culture Potential and Marketability,
Species Diversification: Results of Sunray Venus Nursery and
Growout Trials and Consumer Acceptance Studies,
Water Quality and Temperature Variability Monitoring,
And more, Industry Feedback Session

5:00–6:00 PM **Social Hour**

Results of Hybrid Clam and Sunray Venus field trials will be served.

For more information, contact Leslie Sturmer, UF/IFAS Shellfish Extension,
at 352-543-5057 or LNST@ufl.edu.



RESEARCH UPDATE: The following projects will be presented at the upcoming Clam Industry Workshop.

Culture of Hard Clam Hybrids: Results of Growout Production Trials

Over the past decade, the Florida hard clam aquaculture industry has experienced mortality events resulting from hurricanes, low salinities, and, potentially, high water temperatures. The industry is based primarily on the “notata” variety of the northern hard clam *Meceneria mercenaria*, which may not be suited for some Florida environments. The local southern hard clam *M. campechiensis* may have improved production characteristics for Florida environments and readily hybridizes with *M. mercenaria*, but is known to gape during refrigerated storage. Therefore, a rigorous examination of production characteristics of these species and their hybrids has been undertaken.

Cultured hard clams and wild southern quahogs were used as broodstock and production of reciprocal hybrids was accomplished. Three families were reared under commercial conditions during 2008-9. Survival among families in land and field nurseries ranged from 73-82% and 73-86%, respectively. Differences at these stages were not evident. Approximately 248,000 seed (shell length 15-21 mm) were planted in the fall of 2008 for replicated comparison of stocks, densities (60-85 per square foot), and gear (bottom bag versus bottom plant). Plants were sampled every four months and harvested one year later. In addition, ten growers planted 190,000 seed on commercial leases in three counties for site comparison. At harvest, parental stocks and their hybrids were evaluated for survival, growth (shell length, shell width, total weight, meat weight), condition index, reproductive status, health, and shelf life in refrigerated storage. Market acceptance was documented via a consumer acceptance study and sensory characterization. Preliminary results of these production trials and implications for the hard clam aquaculture industry will be presented at this year’s Clam Industry Workshop. This work is supported by USDA-CSREES.

Descriptive Sensory Evaluation of Hard Clams Cultured from Massachusetts to Florida

A new “sensory characterization or profile description” program is being developed for hard clams *Merceneria* spp. based on established protocol with University of Florida trained panelists. The intent is to provide a non-biased, science-based tool to help direct commercial practices and decisions for marketing and maintaining product standards. Initial efforts have developed rating scales and standards for aquacultured clams from Florida and six other states (MA, NY, NJ, VA, SC, and GA) based on profiling differences and unique sensory attributes for appearance, texture, basic tastes, aroma, and flavors. Results will be presented at this year’s Clam Industry Workshop. A standardized questionnaire and evaluation form can be used by clam growers and wholesalers in other growing locations for assessing sensory attributes of their product. This program can also be used by commercial interests trying to distinguish products by location, season, or process. Users can be trained with established standards to rate and describe the unique character of the products in question. Popular use could lead to local product distinctions or appellations that stimulate and attract consumer interests. This work is supported by the Cedar Key Aquaculture Association and Florida Sea Grant.

Evaluation of the Sunray Venus Clam as an Alternative Species for Aquaculture

The sunray venus clam was commercially fished in Florida during the 1970s. Although natural growth rates were estimated to be high, its patchy distribution limited commercial exploitation. The sunray venus clam is now being evaluated as a potential new aquaculture species to diversify the hard clam culture industry in Florida. Seed production techniques were reported at last year’s Clam Industry Workshop and appear to be similar to hard clams. Production performance of sunray venus clams under field nursery and growout conditions was examined during 2007-8. Sunray venus seed (about 118,000; 9-18 mm shell length, SL) were field-planted in nursery systems (soft bags and hard cages) at densities of 100-550/ft². After 42-119 days, survival ranged from 32-94% and daily growth rate was 0.12-0.25 mm SL. Sunray venus juveniles (27 mm SL; 10 mm shell width, SW) were further cultured in hard cages at densities of 42-55/ft². After 11 months, sunray venus (61-67 mm SL, 22-23 mm SW, 30-37 grams total weight) were harvested for market perception tests. Survival ranged from 50-82%. Production performance of sunray venus grown in soft bags, soft bags with internal PVC frames, and bottom plants for a year at densities of 38-70/ft² will be reported at this year’s workshop. Current trial production efforts are encouraging; but, problems with shell deformities, which may be substrate and gear related, must be resolved.

The market acceptance of the cultured sunray venus clam was demonstrated within the Florida market area in 2008. Four restaurants participated in a market acceptance study with each restaurant receiving a given number of cultured clams each week for 4-6 weeks. A survey solicited the restaurant patron’s reaction to various attributes of sunray venus clams. Survey findings provided insight into the acceptance of cultured sunray venus as a viable seafood product and the willingness of consumers to purchase the product again. Studies planned for 2010 involving industry sectors will be introduced at the October workshop. This research is supported by Florida Sea Grant.



CLAMmunications

International Coastal Cleanup Saturday, September 20, 2008

Sponsored by the Ocean Conservancy, this annual event is a grassroots movement that depends upon the participation of individuals in coastal areas throughout the world. It is an opportune time for clam growers to work with members of their community in removing abandoned culture equipment and debris from around lease areas. To find out who is coordinating the event in your county, visit the website, www.oceanconservancy.org. In Cedar Key, this will kick-off a week dedicated to removing cover netting from the area. All netting is to be deposited at the City Marina. Volunteer and make a difference.

Clam Industry Task Force Meeting & Workshop Wednesday, October 14 10:30 AM–5:00 PM Community Center, Cedar Key

The third meeting of the year of the Industry taskforce will be held in Cedar Key to coincide with the annual industry workshop. All industry members are welcome to participate. A summary of topics to be discussed and projects to be reported can be found on page 3. A social will follow during which results of the hybrid clam and sunray venus clam field trials will be served.

East Coast Shellfish Growers Assoc. Annual Meeting Virginia Aquaculture Conference Friday-Saturday, November 13-14 Williamsburg, Virginia

The annual membership meeting of the ECSGA will coincide this year with the Virginia Aquaculture Conference. The conference agenda is posted at the website, <http://www.vaaquacultureconference.com> and includes sessions on water to table marketing and saltwater aquaculture.

Renew or Sign-up for Clam Crop Insurance Deadline: November 30

Clam growers in Brevard, Dixie, Lee, and Levy Counties are eligible for crop insurance for growout clams and must sign-up or renew their policies by the deadline above. In these economic times, the premiums for the higher "buy up" coverage levels can be hard to afford. However, catastrophic coverage, or CAT, can be purchased at an administrative fee of \$300. Like the NAP program administered by the Farm Service Agency, the level of protection is 50/55 in which 50% of crop value is covered at 55% of the market price. Have your insurance agent review this option with you. Currently, the pilot cultivated clam insurance program is available through crop year 2011.

Save the Date: October 14, 2009 in Cedar Key Statewide Clam Industry Taskforce Meeting and Clam Industry Workshop

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For more information, contact Cooperative Extension Service.

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