

Oyster consumers: preferences & perceptions



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Taste Panels (2012-2013)



- 3 restaurants in Houston, Chicago, and Baldwin County, AL
 - Farm-raised, bottom, & other coast varieties
 - Blind and labeled
- Local oysters seen as better
- Gulf oysters did well against other coasts
- Chicago panelists mostly positive about Gulf oysters
 - Were not especially worried about *Vibrio*
 - Did not know much about Gulf oysters, but had vague notions of them being lower quality





National online survey (2013)

- 730 households
- Non-Gulf households willing to buy Gulf oysters, but at a discount (~\$3-6/half-dozen retail)
- Gulf households less concerned about oyster variety
 - Willing to pay premium for limited varieties (~\$0-3/half-dozen)
- Prefer “wild-caught” over “farm-raised”
 - But other work shows that experience reverses this



NOLA chef survey (2018)

- 6 NOLA chefs that serve oysters on the half-shell
 - asked about marketing “sustainable” oysters
- How important to identify a clear and recognizable brand that conveys the story to restaurants, chefs, and consumers?
 - 5 out of 6 said “very important”
- Consumers more likely to choose these oysters over others if they knew revenues were being re-invested in coastal protection efforts?
 - All 6 said Yes
- How interested are you personally in seeing an effort like this succeed?
 - 5 out of 6 said “very interested”, 1 said “somewhat interested”



What does “sustainable” mean to you?

Chef 1

- Consistent flavor and size
- Safe, clean growing habitat
- High-quality product

Chef 2

- High-quality product
- Consistent supply
- Local grower

Chef 3

- Environmentally-friendly
- High-quality product
- Local grower

Chef 4

- Local grower
- High-quality product
- Environmentally-friendly

Chef 5

- Environmentally-friendly
- Local grower
- Small-scale grower

Chef 6

- Consistent supply
- Environmentally-friendly
- High-quality product



NOLA consumer survey (2018)

- 210 people that eat oysters on the half-shell



“What are the most important things for you when choosing raw oysters?”

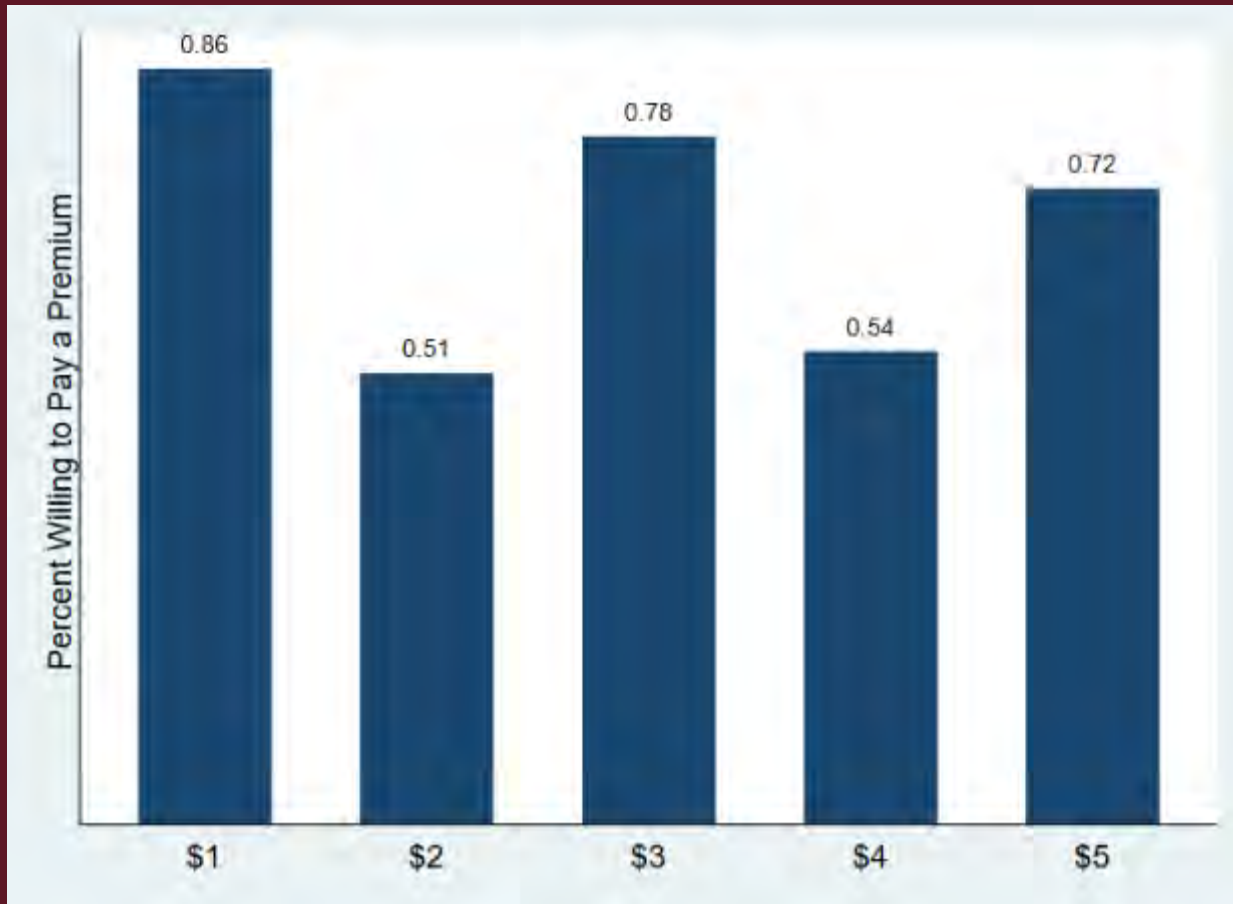


“Which restaurant would you choose to eat oysters?”

- Suppose you were choosing between 2 restaurants in New Orleans that you know to serve good, fresh Louisiana raw oysters on the half-shell.
- The only difference is the price.
 - Restaurant A's price is \$15 per dozen.
 - Restaurant B's price is \$18 per dozen
 - but the extra \$3 goes toward coastal restoration and protection efforts in Louisiana.



Percent of respondents willing to pay premium



Related work

- Other researchers:
 - Consumers willing to pay more when they are told oysters help improve water quality
 - “Eco-labeling” that points out environmental benefits of oyster aquaculture may help attract customers





Do buyers (chefs & wholesalers) recognize quality differences from different production methods?

Do those differences affect purchase decisions?

(2019)

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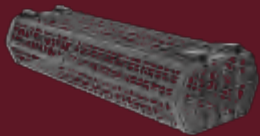


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Treatments

2 gear brands



Hexcyl

2 tumbling frequencies



Monthly
Quarterly

2 air-drying frequencies



Daily with tides
Weekly for 24 hrs

2 oyster ploidies



Photo: John Nell

Diploid Triploid



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Purchase decisions (6 chefs, 6 wholesalers)

Price willing to pay

- Shuckability
- Meat Consistency



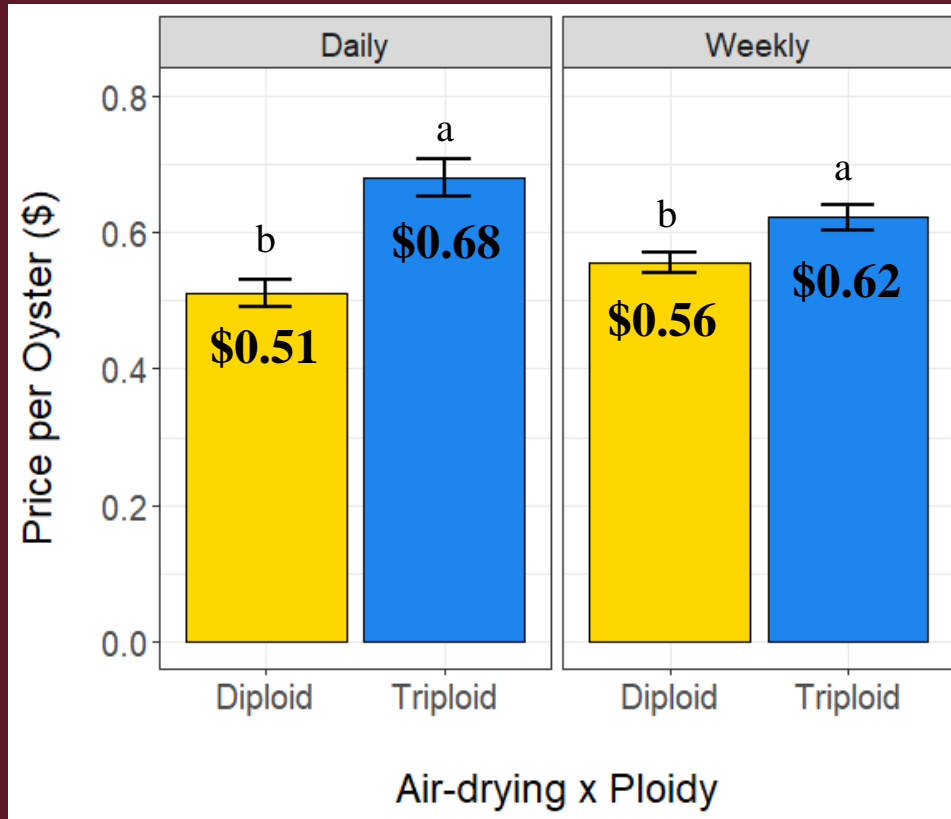
Photo: Jessica Chou
Photo: Connie Lu

Purchase rank

- Shuckability
- Meat Consistency
- Shell Shape



Purchase decisions (wholesale price)



- Price higher for daily air-drying x triploids

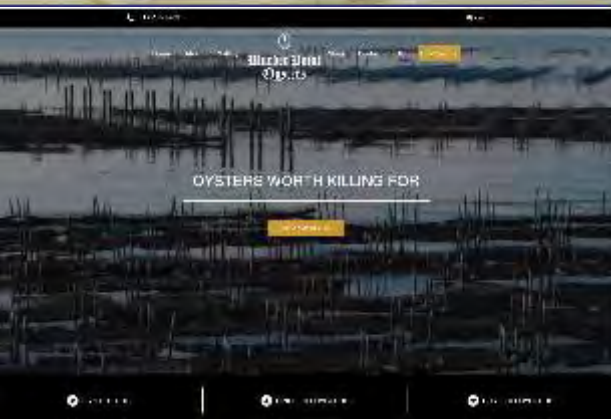


Findings



- All methods used in study produced “high quality” oysters
- Different production combinations yield perceivable quality differences
- Participants willing to pay more for what they perceived as higher quality
- No effect of gear or tumbling
 - farmers should base on personal preference
- Use of **daily air-drying** and **triploid** oysters resulted in higher willingness to pay





Key takeaways

- Consumers looking for oysters that:
 - stand out
 - quality, look, flavor
 - tell a story
 - are “local”
 - are “sustainable”

