USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Shellfish Aquaculture

(Regional Conservation Partnership Program)

Virginia Overview

NRCS has been helping people help the land for more than 80 years but has only recently begun working with producers whose harvests come from the sea.

Successful growth and harvesting of oysters contributes to and depends on clean water. The Virginia Aquaculture Program is designed to address habitat degradation and support sustainable oyster farming for a healthier Chesapeake Bay.

NRCS offers special funding to help growers improve the water quality and habitat shellfish need to thrive in the Chesapeake Bay.

How We Can Help

NRCS is offering dedicated funding and resources through a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project to help growers expand their footprint for oyster production on private leases and re-establish historically productive areas through bottom restoration (using oyster shell or VMRC-approved/permitted stone) along with spat-on-shell production in areas of limited natural recruitment.

This approach requires proper preparation of the leased beds to create a firm substrate. NRCS offers financial assistance for placement of new shell or VMRC-approved/permitted stone on the bottom to significantly improve the success rate for production on beds that have remained fallow for years.

Through our partnership, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) will share knowledge gained from restoring thousands of acres of public oyster beds with oyster growers on private leases. VMRC and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) will help applicants build a restoration plan for their ground, including the best location on a lease for restoration, substrate options and sourcing, permit requirements for using non-shell, and spat on shell production.

Eligibility

The project area includes all privately-leased bottomlands suitable for oyster cultivation in Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. Tidal areas are considered state waters, so most bottom aquaculture operations require a state lease.

Individual tracts of leased ground will only qualify one time for oyster bed restoration and one time for enhancement/replenishment. The funding cap for practice code 643 (Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitat) is $20,000/producer/year.

How to apply

If you are interested in participating in the aquaculture initiative, you must first meet VMRC technical eligibility requirements.

Partnering for a Cleaner Bay

The recently renewed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project, *Oyster Bottom Restoration through Aquaculture*, will continue to offer dedicated funding and resources to help growers expand their footprint for oyster production on private leases and provide lasting benefits beyond the life of the lease and the practice.

Images courtesy of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science.

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.

The pre-approval form is available on the Virginia NRCS website and at the participating Service Centers listed below.

Program sign-up is continuous with periodic evaluation and pre-approvals throughout the year. NRCS will help eligible producers develop a conservation plan, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract. EQIP applications are ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

Learn more

Contact your local NRCS office or visit us online at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov to learn more about the shellfish aquaculture project. Consult the list below or visit farmers.gov to find a participating USDA Service Center.

Virginia Aquaculture Program Contacts and Locations

Jeff Jones, State Biologist
1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209, Henrico, VA 23229-5014
PH: 804-287-1636 / **Email:** jeffray.jones@usda.gov

District Conservationist	Service Center/Localities Served
Jennifer Templeton PH: 757-302-4435 jennifer.templeton@usda.gov	**Accomac**: Accomack and Northampton counties
Trenton Howell PH: 757-389-7606 trenton.howell@usda.gov	**Chesapeake**: Cities of Chesapeake, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth and Norfolk
Scott Hammond PH: 804-210-3243 scott.hammond@usda.gov	**Gloucester**: Gloucester, Mathews and Middlesex counties
Michael Combs PH: 804-966-3076 michael.combs@usda.gov	**Quinton**: Cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, Richmond and Williamsburg; and Charles City, Henrico, James City, New Kent and York counties
Jake Browder PH: 757-279-3286 jake.browder@usda.gov	**Smithfield**: City of Suffolk and Isle of Wight and Surry counties
Dwight Forrester PH: 804-466-3188 dwight.forrester@usda.gov	**Tappahannock**: Essex, King William and King and Queen counties
Lucee Kossler PH: 804-250-4462 lucia.kossler@.usda.gov	**Warsaw**: Richmond, Westmoreland, Northumberland and Lancaster counties

Virginia
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service
va.nrcs.usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender. Virginia • November 2023

Guidance documents lack the force and effect of law, unless expressly authorized by statute or incorporated into a contract. USDA may not cite, use, or rely on any guidance that is not available through their guidance portal, except to establish historical facts.