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Sent: Thursday, February 07, 2013 7:02 AM
To: mtammaro@rtenv.com
Subject: AQUACULTURE HELPS OYSTER HARVESTS REBOUND IN NEW JERSEY - NYC DINERS LOVE THEM!

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AQUACULTURE HELPS OYSTER HARVESTS REBOUND IN NEW JERSEY - NYC DINERS LOVE THEM!

Press Release

New Jersey was once home to a booming oyster industry, as evidenced by the Victorian mansions along Cape May that were erected by fishing barons and the coastal communities such as Bivalve and Shell Pile that took their names from the plentiful natural resource lining Delaware Bay.

"In the heyday, they were shipping 20 boxcars of oysters a day," said Douglas Fisher, the state Secretary of Agriculture.

Disease, overaggressive fishing and other factors eventually crippled the industry in the 1950s and again in the 1990s. But New Jersey oysters are rebounding through advances in growing techniques, increased demand and a new push from the state to drive economic activity in some of its poorest counties.

After harvesting an annual average of 36,600 bushels in the 1990s, fisherman had a banner year in 2011, when 95,000 bushels were landed, though that number dipped last year to 78,000.

The industry is concentrated in the Delaware Bay, northwest of Cape May, in Cumberland County. Restaurateurs and oyster harvesters say, the shallow bay's nutrients and water flow help make the oysters plump, sweet and briny.

Much of the shellfish is bought by canneries and have yet to become menu mainstays, in part, restaurant owners say, because New Jersey's reputation has faded as a provider of fresh shellfish, even in its own region.

That reputation, however, may be changing.

"Once people have them, they become fan favorites," said Krystof Zizka, co-owner of Maison Premiere in Brooklyn. "Unfortunately, there's some skepticism initially."

Cape May Salts, a brand sold by large New Jersey producer Atlantic Cape Fisheries,

are served in New York restaurants such as Maison Premiere and Telepan on Manhattan's Upper West Side. "These are perfectly balanced," said Bill Telepan, the restaurant's owner. "Customers will call me out and say these oysters were terrific."

Oyster harvesting generates nearly \$4 million for local growers, according to the state Department of Environmental Protections. Officials say oystering generates \$20 million in economic activity - the ripple effects beyond direct sales.

In the 20th century, Delaware Bay produced more than a million bushels of oysters a year, but began tapering off in the 1930s and was down to 49,000 in 1960. Since the mid-1990s, with the introduction of a quota system that limits the amount of oysters that could be harvested, the annual haul has rebounded to an average of 72,000 bushels in the past 10 years.

Recently, the federal government, along with Delaware and New Jersey, tried to improve the wild-shellfish habitat by dropping millions of clam shells into the bay, which helps oysters mature by giving the larvae something to attach to.

Oyster aquaculture has "gone from an experimental phase to selling \$1.4 million oysters thus far this year," said Brian Harmon, oyster farm manager of Atlantic Cape Fisheries, which for now sells Cape May Salts from Washington, D.C., to New York. This is up from \$750,000 total in 2011.

Oyster harvesters are cautiously optimistic about aquaculture. "It's been good for me," said Barney Hollinger, owner of Elder Point Oyster Co. of Port Norris, who started practicing aquaculture in 2007 after decades of wild fishing. "It's definitely keeping people in business and keeping people working."

The oyster delicacy resurgence is great news for Cumberland County, NJ. Little known to many, some of the roots of the revolution which started the United States government sprouted in Bridgeton and Greenwich where an early revolution era "Tea Party" was held. By the early 1800s two railroads competed to rush freshly harvested oysters overnight to New York diners. Environmental water quality improvements and NJDEP's programs have made improved oyster delicacy harvests and good jobs possible!

(By Heather Haddon, Wall Street Journal, 1/26/13)

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