



Agricultural Act of 2014

Shellfish Aquaculture

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Virginia Overview

The successful growth and harvesting of shellfish contributes to and depends on clean water. The Virginia Aquaculture Program is designed to enhance the sustainability of aquaculture while reducing adverse impacts on water quality for shellfish producers.

Through a special partnership with the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering funding to help shellfish aquaculture growers improve water quality and increase oyster habitat in the Chesapeake Bay.



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

Though NRCS has been helping people help the land for more than 75 years, the agency has only recently begun working with producers whose harvests come from the sea. Assistance is now available for gear cycling and oyster bed restoration practices.

Gear Cycling: When gear on the site becomes fouled, NRCS can provide funding for the grower to replace it with clean gear. The fouled gear is brought on shore, air dried, and cleaned in an approved off-site area. Payments ranging from \$26 to \$135 per bag or cage may be approved, depending on labor requirements for various gear.

Oyster Bed Restoration or Enhancement/Replenishment: Successful oyster growth occurs on beds that have a firm substrate. Leased land that





Image courtesy of the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences.

needs improvements to the bottom for spat on shell may qualify for oyster bed restoration assistance. A payment of \$5,000 to \$10,000 per acre for placement of new shell on the bottom to restore habitat may be approved.

Eligibility

Tidal bottoms within areas of Virginia’s bays and rivers capable of supporting oysters are eligible. Since tidal waters are considered State waters, 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. Contracts are for one year with a \$5,000/year payment cap for gear cycling and \$20,000/year payment cap for oyster bed restoration (new habitat) or enhancement/replenishment (restoring existing habitat).

How to apply

If you’re interested in participating in the Aquaculture Initiative, you must first meet VMRC technical eligibility requirements. The pre-approval form is available on the Virginia NRCS website and at the participating Service Centers listed in the chart above.

Program sign-up is continuous with periodic evaluation and pre-approvals throughout the year.

Virginia NRCS Aquaculture Program Contacts and Locations

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District Conservationist	Service Center/ Localities Served
Jane Corson-Lassiter PH: 757-787-0918, ext. 110 jane.lassiter@va.usda.gov	Accomac: Accomack and Northampton Counties
Robert E. Williams 757-547-7172, ext. 102 robert.williams@va.usda.gov	Chesapeake: Cities of Chesapeake, Virginia Beach, Portsmouth, and Norfolk
Michael Combs 804-693-3562, ext. 104 michael.combs@va.usda.gov	Gloucester: Gloucester, Mathews, and Middlesex Counties
Matthew Jones 804-932-4376, ext. 101 matthew.jones@va.usda.gov	Quinton: Cities of Hampton, Newport News, Poquoson, Williamsburg, and Richmond and Charles City, New Kent, James City, York, and Henrico Counties
Michael A. (Mike) Faulk 757-357-7004, ext. 114 mike.faulk@va.usda.gov	Smithfield: City of Suffolk and Isle of Wight and Surry Counties
John A. Dille 804-443-3571, ext. 111 john.dille@va.usda.gov	Tappahannock: Essex, King William, and King and Queen Counties
Debbie A. Bullock 804-333-3525, ext. 101 debbie.bullock@va.usda.gov	Warsaw: Richmond, Westmoreland, Northumberland, and Lancaster Counties

Call the NRCS field office at your local USDA Service Center or visit us online at www.va.nrcs.usda.gov for more information.

NRCS will help eligible producers develop a conservation plan, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract. EQIP applications will be ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

More Information

For more information, visit your local USDA Service Center or www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill.



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