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ENVIRONMENTAL CODE OF PRACTICES FOR THE VIRGINIA SHELLFISH CULTURE INDUSTRY

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Commerce, NOAA, or any of its subagencies.

This Environmental Code of Practices for the Virginia Shellfish Culture Industry has been endorsed by the following:

- *Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS),*
- *VDACS governor-appointed Aquaculture Advisory Board,*
- *Virginia Farm Bureau Federation Aquaculture Advisory Committee.*



Virginia Coastal Zone
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VIRGINIA SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL CODE OF PRACTICES

Preamble

Shellfish growers in Virginia, like traditional family farmers are independent food producers. Although shellfish growers are subject to numerous state and federal regulations, they strive to maintain excellence in production practices that reach beyond these regulations. The following set of principles outlines a broad consensus within the industry regarding codes of practices designed to ensure that this valuable food production industry protects and enhances the coast environments within Virginia.

Environmental stewardship

The shellfish aquaculture industry in Virginia is committed to environmentally-responsible, sustainable production of shellfish in Virginia's coastal waters. While engaged in the production of a valuable food commodity, members of this industry also recognize the important role that they play as stewards of the coastal environment and they are committed to continually evaluating and improving their practices to achieve these goals. Virginia's shellfish growers appreciate that they are completely dependent upon a healthy estuarine ecosystem to support their culture activities. As such, they are committed to active involvement in management issues related to shoreline, watershed and water use planning. Further, they are committed to ensuring that their culture and processing activities meet the highest standards of environmental stewardship.

Estuarine ecosystems are sensitive environments on which many other organisms depend. Shellfish growers in Virginia are committed to protecting biodiversity in our coastal waters and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Thus, they encourage scientific research to improve our knowledge about how shellfish farming interacts with the environment, including positive and potentially negative impacts.

Clean water

There is no single factor on which the shellfish aquaculture industry is more dependent than excellent water quality. Virginia's shellfish growers are, thus, fully committed to the protection and maintenance of the highest water quality in shellfish growing areas. This commitment includes setting the highest standards possible in their own practices and serving as advocates for clean water in regional planning activities.

Waste management

Culturing shellfish in our coastal waters requires use of various gears for protection from predators (nets, bags, trays, etc.), marking culture sites and harvesting. Members of this industry are committed to implementing management procedures that minimize the amount and impacts of waste from their production practices. These procedures include, when possible, reducing the amounts of material used, re-using and recycling materials and recovery and removal of waste materials.

Aesthetic considerations and other resource users

Virginia's shellfish growers recognize that they share the Commonwealth's valuable coastal environments with many other users. They are committed to working cooperatively with all other users of this resource to reduce conflict, ensure continued access to these resources and promote environmentally-responsible uses. Shellfish farmers also appreciate the importance of aesthetic considerations from both upland owners and other water users and will strive to reduce unwanted visual impacts from their operations.

Disease management and genetic integrity

The health of Virginia's shellfish aquaculture industry is dependent upon careful management of risks posed by shellfish diseases. Industry members fully support the implementation and funding of state programs to provide disease testing for shellfish. The industry also holds the view that any movement of shellfish seed should be conducted in a responsible manner to minimize the introduction of unwanted diseases and pest organisms. Similarly, since disease susceptibility of shellfish stocks is related to their genetic make-up, shellfish growers are committed to the development and maintenance of stocks that reduce risks from disease.

Regulatory compliance

Virginia's shellfish growers recognize that the waters and submerged land on which the industry depends is a commonly owned state resource. Accordingly, we are aware of the need for regulation and are committed to full compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations relevant to aquaculture. It is hoped that industry compliance with the *Environmental Code of Practices* and the *Best Management Practices for the Virginia Shellfish Culture Industry* will minimize the need for overly burdensome regulatory requirements.