



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Massachusetts

CONSERVATION *Showcase*

A Sea Change for Conservation

Cape Cod shellfish growers join in successful EQIP pilot

In a nationally unique pilot program under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Cape Cod's shellfish growers were eligible for cost-share assistance on conservation practices for the first time in 2005.



Joel Fox, grower

In 2005, some \$247,000 in cost-share funding was provided through 21 contracts with aquaculturists who raise scallops, oysters and clams throughout Cape Cod.

For 2006, nearly \$302,000 in cost-share will be provided through 13 contracts covering

44 acres of shellfish beds, primarily in Barnstable Harbor.

"Barnstable Harbor is our targeted growing area for

2006," said Don Liptack, NRCS District Conservationist for Cape Cod and the Islands. "Sixty-seven percent of the growers in Barnstable Harbor will participate this year, which will provide a significant benefit to the water body."



A shellfish farm in Wellfleet Harbor

The state technical committee had recommended that a single body of water be targeted to achieve more effective results. The following year, Wellfleet Harbor will be targeted, according to Liptack, then other Massachusetts water bodies in subsequent years.

Shellfish aquaculture best management practices protect water quality by controlling oil and gasoline emissions from outboard motors, endangered species through gear management, and shellfish health through buffers, record keeping and monitoring.

In October 2005, NRCS Chief Bruce Knight and USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Natural Resources and the Environment Merlyn Carlson visited the Wellfleet Harbor growers to learn more about this special kind of farming and its unique conservation practices.



Chief Bruce Knight and Joel Fox

Shellfish aquaculture is the commercial seeding, growing and harvesting of marine mollusks or other invertebrates in a natural or manufactured environment.

Town-issued shellfish licenses allow growers to farm in off-shore waters. Statewide, shellfish growers farm 300 acres.

Aquaculture (shellfish and finfish) in Massachusetts is a \$6.9 million industry. The value of shellfish farming in Wellfleet Harbor alone is estimated at \$2-3 million.

For Cape Cod's growers, aquaculture can be either a full-time or part-time occupation. Operations vary in size, though even a small operation can be profitable; a two acre shellfish farm can support a business.



Shellfish racks at low tide

To raise oysters, "seed" is planted in metal mesh racks that protect the juvenile mollusks from predators. With legs that sit on the sea bed, the racks are covered by water at high tide but are exposed and accessible at low tide.



A 100 foot row can produce five tons of product.



Growers working in Wellfleet Harbor

As the animals mature, they are planted in the sea bed until they are harvested. The racks are not used when raising clams. Growers do not feed the shellfish nor add anything else to them. The bivalves filter all the nutrients they need from the water.

A 100 foot row will produce 75,000 to 100,000 animals or five tons of product. As one grower put it, aquaculture is sustainable fishing.

And as the state agriculture department's aquaculture specialist, Scott Soares, likes to say: aquaculture is agriculture...just add water.

