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SECRETARY OF COMMERCE ANNOUNCES 2006 NATIONAL MARINE AQUACULTURE AWARDS *Two University of Miami Projects Selected*

U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez today announced that two grants totaling \$550,000 have been awarded to the University of Miami for aquaculture research. The grants are part of a nationwide program of \$3.6 million in grants for sustainable marine aquaculture demonstration projects and research. The funding was awarded under the 2006 National Marine Aquaculture Initiative, a competitive grants program managed by the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"The grants to the University of Miami show an ongoing commitment to developing this young but rapidly growing industry," said U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez. "As seafood becomes a larger part of a healthy diet, the U.S. aquaculture industry is expected to create 25,000 new jobs directly, and support another 75,000 in other industries over the next few decades. We need this type of collaborative research to answer key questions so that the potential for aquaculture can be realized."

Led by researchers Dr. Daniel Benetti and Dr. Larry Brand from the University of Miami's Rosensteil School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, the Miami-based projects will demonstrate the technological and economic feasibility of cobia aquaculture as part of a broader effort to support successful cobia aquaculture in the southeastern United States and Caribbean. Cobia is a high-value marine food fish and an excellent candidate for commercial aquaculture development and production in the United States. Progress by these researchers and others in developing and demonstrating cobia aquaculture technology over the last five years is recognized for bringing this emerging industry to the verge of commercial viability in the United States.

"With fisheries in decline, the burden is on scientists to develop truly ecologically sustainable aquaculture programs," said Dr. Daniel Benetti, associate professor and chair of the UM Rosenstiel School Division of Marine Affairs and Policy. "We plan to address some of the immediate technological problems facing aquaculture to also make this a process that is economically sustainable.

"Our research will determine if these fish cages have an impact on the local environment, and if so, how much," said Dr. Larry Brand, a professor in the Rosenstiel School's Division of Marine Biology and Fisheries. "Our goal is to have an

early warning system to detect any environmental impacts when they are minor so that major impacts can be prevented."

The 2006 grants range from \$199,000 to \$505,000 and support projects that assess the commercial potential of marine aquaculture, the feasibility of stock enhancement and environmental impacts of aquaculture in various environments. The grants also support research on key aquatic animal nutrition and health issues. Specifically, the 2006 projects focus on genome mapping of striped bass, culture of California yellowtail, enhancement of cobia, assessment of environmental impacts of offshore cage culture, use of dietary prebiotics on warm water and coldwater marine fishes, and commercialization of bait shrimp farming.

This year's competition attracted applicants from universities, nonprofit organizations, commercial organizations, individuals, and federal, state, local and Indian tribal governments. Over 200 proposals were submitted seeking more than \$75 million in funding.

Since 1998, NMAI has funded a total of \$15 million in projects to support research to boost the domestic production of commercially and recreationally valuable marine shellfish and finfish species. Projects have responded to key scientific, engineering, environmental and economic questions for aquaculture. The projects focused on five key categories, including candidate species, health and nutrition, best management practices and ecosystems monitoring and management, engineered production systems, and legal and operational frameworks. Within these specific categories, many of the NMAI projects have focused on three areas – shellfish farming, new production systems such as offshore aquaculture, closed recirculating and aquaculture policy development.

In 2007 NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, celebrates 200 years of science and service to the nation. Starting with the establishment of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA. The agency is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

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On the Web:

NOAA Aquaculture Program: www.aquaculture.noaa.gov

NOAA Sea Grant: www.seagrant.noaa.gov/

NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov

NOAA Research: www.oar.noaa.gov/

NOAA: www.noaa.gov