

Frequently Asked Questions: Rhode Island Aquaculture



What is grown in RI?

Currently all of the farms in the state's waters grow shellfish with the vast majority being oysters, a small amount of mussels, hard clams, and kelp also grown.



Who regulates aquaculture in Rhode Island?

The RI Coastal Resources Management Council is the lead agency for all aquaculture management in RI. The Council works with Department of Environmental Management, the Department of Health, fishing groups (both commercial and recreational), municipalities, and environmental organizations when permitting an aquaculture lease.



Does the state give the submerged land away?

The area occupied by an aquaculture farm is not given away. The water and land beneath it belongs to and is held in trust for all of the citizens of the state. The area is managed under the "Public Trust Doctrine" for everyone. Aquaculture farms can get a limited lease of the submerged land from the state, but they do not own it. The lease area, in fact, is usually not an exclusive lease, and still can be utilized for many other purposes. If a farmer abuses the lease provisions, the state can revoke the lease.



Can any area be leased?

No. In consultation with fishing groups and other regulatory agencies, there are many restrictions on which areas can be leased. Areas that support a wild harvest of shellfish, areas of eelgrass, navigation areas, etc. are examples of areas not suitable for aquaculture farms.



How long are the leases valid?

The RI Legislature has set the lease maximum length at 15 years. Leases are renewable by the farmers upon submission of an extension request upon expiration of their lease, good for another 10 years, providing the farmer has continued to abide by the conditions in the lease.



How can I recognize an aquaculture farm?

Markers are required at all four corners of the lease area, and all buoys must have CRMC and the lease permit number clearly printed on them.



FAQ:

Continued...



What does the farmer have to do to maintain the lease?

The lease must be actively farmed and comply with all of the conditions of the permit. The farmer has to post a bond to enable the state to remove the gear in case of default and the farmer has to pay a yearly lease fee, and must submit an annual report. Failure to comply with any of the conditions of the lease can result in the lease being revoked.



Are there limits on the amount of area that can be leased?

Yes, the CRMC, in consultation with the fishing industry and other regulatory agencies, has developed guidelines that restrict aquaculture to a maximum 5% of any coastal pond. Limits in the Bay apply, depending on the farm's location.



How is shellfish disease managed?

The first thing to remember is that this concerns diseases of shellfish only. None of the diseases that seed are tested for are capable of affecting humans. The state does not allow shellfish with diseases capable of affecting humans to be brought into the state. A report from a certified disease specialist certifying the seed as disease-free must be supplied to CRMC prior to any permission being granted to import shellfish seed into the state. CRMC also has an Aquaculture Biosecurity Board to ensure the rules are kept up to date.



Can I use the farm area too?

Yes, within limits. The public can pass through a farm, however it is illegal to disturb the farmer's gear or harvest his or her stock. At all times mariners are expected to use caution and common sense when traversing farms. When in doubt, ask the farmer or the Aquaculture Coordinator at the CRMC.



Will the state allow marine finfish farms?

Possibly, but it would be very difficult to permit a finfish farm in RI waters. One of the existing problems is excess nutrients polluting the state's waters, and a marine finfish farm would add to this, from fish feeds and waste. Finfish farms are already prohibited in the coastal ponds because of this pollution concern.

Rhode Island Aquaculture Industry 2019 At a Glance

- Farms in Rhode Island increased from **76 to 81**
- Total area now under cultivation is **339.08 acres**
- Oysters remain the number one aquaculture product with more than **8.3 million sold for consumption**
- Farm gate value of aquaculture products for consumption was **\$5.74 million**
- Oyster seed sales from RI aquaculturists was valued at **\$326,796**
- Combined value of aquaculture products for consumption and seed sales was **\$6.07 million**
- Number of aquaculture farm workers increased from 200 to 219

Shellfish aquaculture is a growing industry in Rhode Island. As it grows, farms are becoming more visible.

The CRMC always strives to balance all interests in relation to aquaculture in public trust waters.

For more information on RI Aquaculture please visit: www.crmc.ri.gov/aquaculture.html

Dollar Value of Aquaculture

