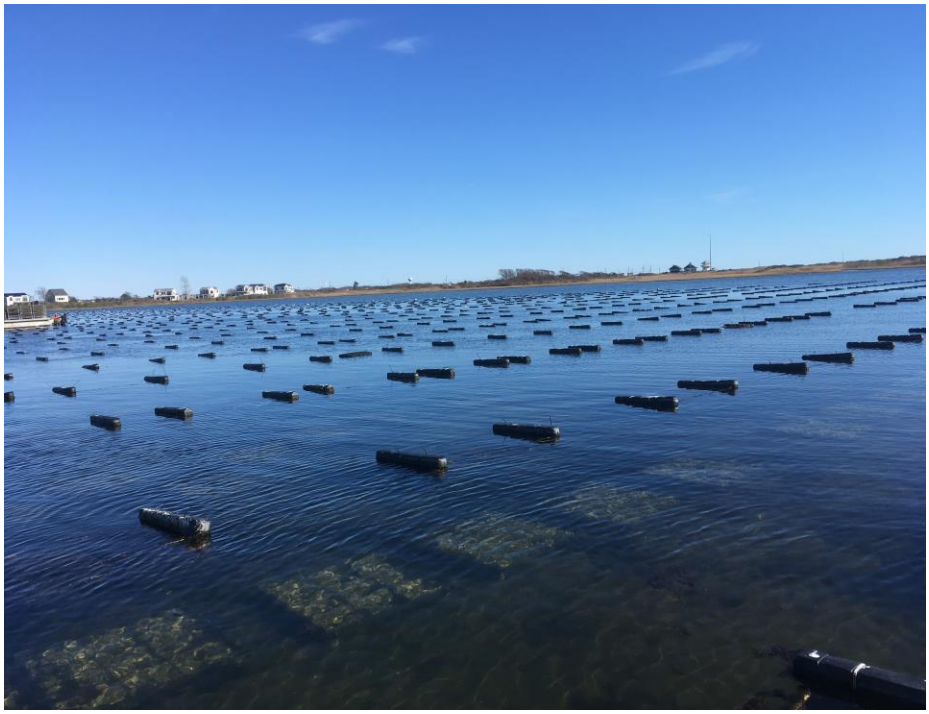
Aquaculture in Rhode Island 2019



Photograph: CRMC

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Figure 1. Great Salt Pond kelp *Photograph: Catherine Puckett*

Rhode Island Aquaculture Industry - 2019
At a Glance

- The number of farms in Rhode Island increased from 76 to 81
- The total area now under cultivation increased 19.78 acres for a total of 339.08 acres
- Oysters remained the number one aquaculture product with 8,321,579 sold for consumption
- The farm gate value of aquaculture products for consumption was $5,744,506
- 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
- The number of aquaculture farm workers increased to 219

Figure 2. Quonochontaug Pond oyster. *Photograph: Jennifer Scappatura*

Introduction

The year 2019 saw a modest rise in aquaculture oyster production and value from the previous year. The growth in total acreage was 19.78 acres, a modest 6.2 percent increase for the year. Farmers have worked on raising new crops: sugar kelp, soft shell clams, surf clams, and bay scallops. RI aquaculturists are inventive, efficient, and working to diversify their crops and use the newest growing technologies.

Figure 3. High and low profile floating oyster cages *Photograph: CRMC*

How the figures were derived

Harvest figures came from the yearly CRMC aquaculture questionnaire distributed to all leaseholders. All reports are taken as an accurate value. Monetary figures for this report were calculated by averaging an estimated yearly average wholesale price from multiple sources. This figure was then multiplied by the numbers reported by growers in the yearly CRMC report to arrive at the figures used in this report. Figures from the aquaculture-associated industries came from the principals involved in these privately held companies. Four operations sold oyster seed in 2019. The figures

cited are for gross sales of aquaculture-related products including seed sales. A number of shellfish growers are also shellfish dealers. The sales that are direct to end users are at a higher value than wholesale price used in the averaging. Using a wholesale price results in a lower value determined for the aquaculture products but also results in a consistency of format over the years of reporting.

Farm Production

The 2019 farm gate value of Rhode Island grown products was $6,071,302 which was a decline of 0.38 percent from the 2018 farm gate value. Seed sales for 2019 rose 34.3 percent to $326,796 while kelp sales declined by 6.7 percent to $15,894. The winter conditions of 2018/2019 resulted in a large mortality for a number of oyster farms. Additionally an oyster disease affected four oyster farms. These two events resulted in the overall decrease in oyster production for 2019.

The number of farms active in Rhode Island aquaculture at the end of 2019 was 81, with cultivation of 339.08 acres. Eastern oysters, *Crassostrea virginica*, continue as the most valuable cultivated species in Rhode Island.

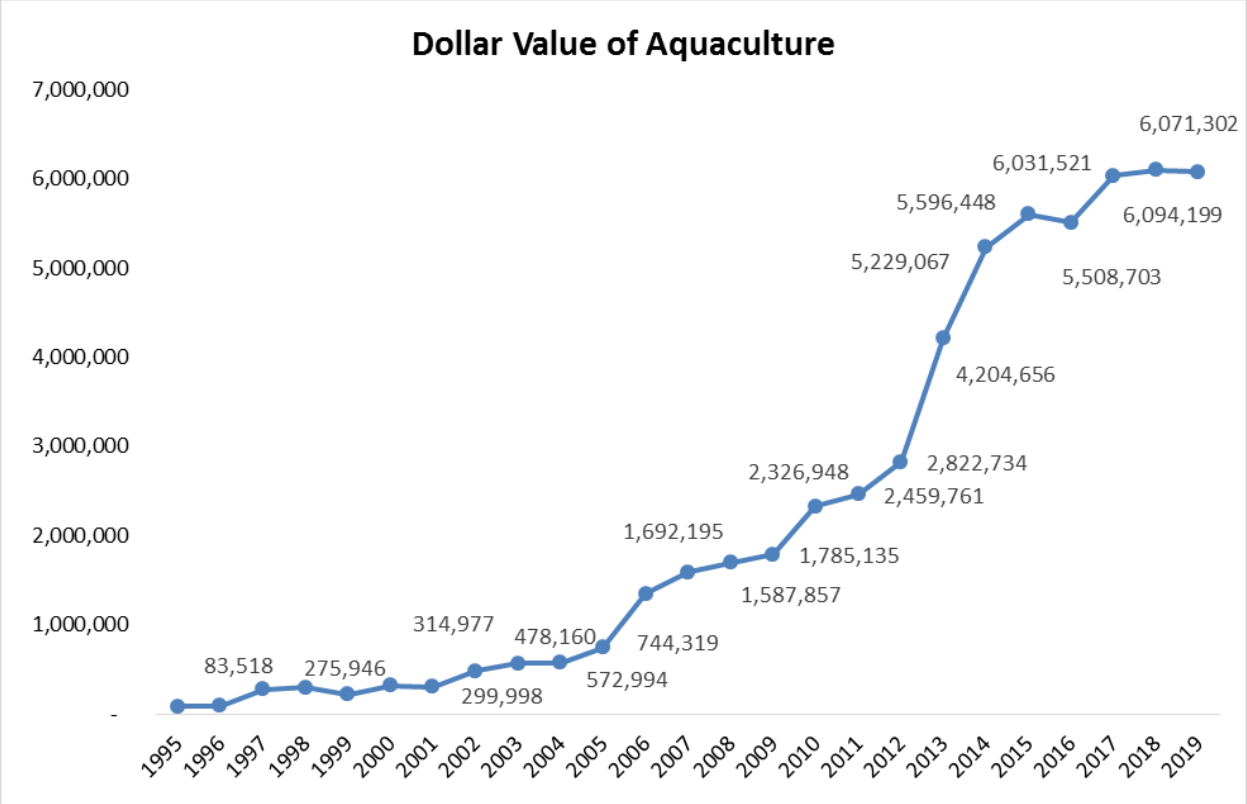

Figure 4. Total dollar value of aquaculture

Aquaculture Employment

Year	Full Time Year	Full Time Season	Part Time Year	Part Time Season	Total
2006	17	8	17	15	57
2007	14	2	28	15	61
2008	12	1	25	24	62
2009	14	3	25	20	62
2010	17	4	30	28	79
2011	23	3	26	32	84
2012	32	9	32	32	105
2013	35	13	37	42	127
2014	47	17	35	43	142
2015	47	26	39	59	171
2016	49	30	49	49	177
2017	62	27	41	64	194
2018	62	31	38	69	200
2019	59	47	46	67	219

Figure 5. Aquaculture farm jobs increased by 9.5% in 2019

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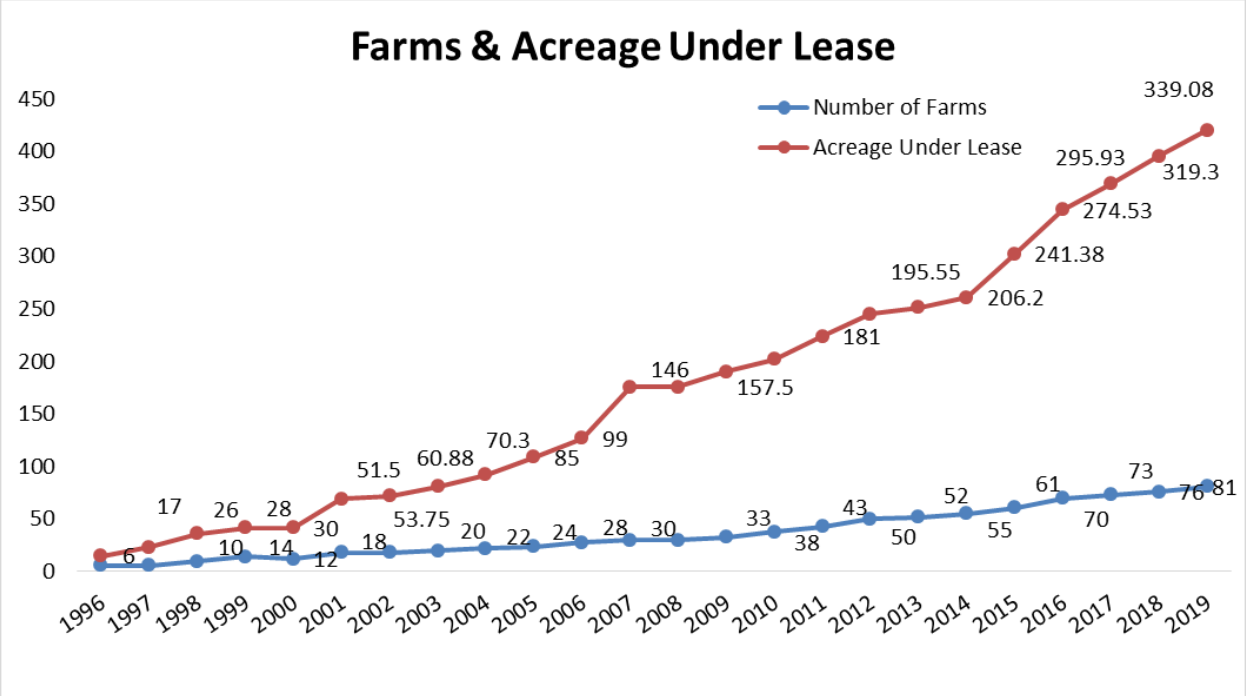

Figure 6. Acreage for the 81 farms is 339.08

Figure 7. Oyster on the half shell *Photograph: Matt Griffin*

Universities, Environmental Organizations, State and Federal Agencies

Two educational institutions conduct aquaculture research activities, extension programs, and academic programs in Rhode Island. Both Roger Williams University (RWU) and the University of Rhode Island (URI) are centers of excellence in the field of aquaculture. Both universities have pathology testing capabilities and are assets to the shellfish aquaculture and wild harvest industries. They each have projects concerning the nascent kelp industry in RI. URI has research projects growing yellowfin tuna and urchins. Extension projects at RWU include oyster restoration, the practical shellfish farming course, and a public enhancement project for quahogs and oysters partnering with the RI Shellfishermen's Association. Rhode Island Sea Grant continues to provide aquaculture education opportunities for interested constituents. The RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM) partners with The Nature Conservancy, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the aquaculture industry on oyster reefs restoration projects. The RIDEM and the RI Department of Health continue to monitor harmful algal concentrations and the program has successfully protected human health. The USDA continues to fund the shellfish sentinel program looking at shellfish disease levels in the different biosecurity zones.

Figure 8. Winnapaug Pond *Photograph: Tom Gardner*

Outlook for 2020

Aquaculture businesses are challenged by the Covid-19 shutdowns. Restaurants serve and sell most of the nation's shellfish aquaculture products. The government, at all levels, is working to keep the future of the businesses viable. It is the strength of our collective resolve that will determine the future of this industry. Seafood remains an important component of the economy and the foundation for many communities in Rhode Island. Celebrate the opportunities to enjoy Rhode Island seafood.