



CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Connecticut Shell Fishing Industry Profile

Connecticut oysters have a reputation for quality and an outstanding safety record. Shell fishing is an important component of Connecticut's economy and its recreation and tourism industries. The DA/BA and the state shellfishing industry have consistently worked with Town recreational shellfishing programs to stock areas for harvest by the public.

- Connecticut Shellfishing generates \$30 Million plus in farm-gate sales annually.
- The Connecticut shellfishing industry provides over 300 jobs statewide.
- Annually Connecticut shellfish harvests exceed 450,000 bushels of Hard Clams and 200,000 of bushels Oysters.
- More than 70,000 acres of shellfish farms are now under cultivation in Connecticut's coastal waters.

Cultch Oyster Seed Preparation

To foster industry growth the State Legislature established a program within the Department of Agriculture for the purchase of cultch (shells) for planting on the States' public seed oyster beds (Gen. Statute 26-237 a). The cultch program was established in 1987 with an initial bond authorization of \$1.3 million. Subsequently, an additional \$4,000,000 was bonded and harvesters taking seed from enhancement areas paid a 10% assessment on the sale value of their harvests. The money, collected by the Department of Revenue Services, was deposited in a dedicated fund to help sustain this program. The program enhanced over 3,000 acres of State beds with approximately 5.2 million bushels of shells.

The cultch was distributed and planted by volunteers from the oyster industry. Planting shells on which oyster spat attach and grow as seed improves the overall condition and productivity of oyster beds. Oyster larvae settle on cultch in late summer and thumbnail sized oysters are harvested by licensed seed oystermen in the fall and following spring. The seed is then sold to aquaculture leaseholders for growth in deeper clean water. Adult oysters are harvested for market three to four years later. The cultch program provided the continued availability of seed critical to the stability and future of the Connecticut oyster industry.

The State's economic problems have left the program unfunded for five consecutive years...

Leasing Shellfish Grounds

This program permits shellfish farmers to obtain underwater lands in Long Island Sound for the purpose of planting, cultivating, and harvesting shellfish crops. All applications to lease grounds must be approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture.

The Department of Agriculture leases shellfish grounds through competitive bids. C.G.S 26-194 specifies a minimum bid of \$4.00/acre. There are more than 70,000 acres farmed by the industry, approximately 12,000 acres of which are leased by local shellfish commissions. A lease is granted for a 3-10 year term with renewal option, provided the lessee has paid rental fees. Leases will be granted by the Commissioner of Agriculture to the highest responsible bidder.

All bids must be accompanied by a check, payable to the Commissioner of Agriculture, for one year's rental fee. If an applicant is not the highest bidder the application fee and the one year rental fee will be returned. The successful bidder pays the costs of the Application fee, a year's rental fee in advance, \$35.00 per corner to cover surveying cost, any poles, buoys, buoy stones, floats, and rope used in connection with the surveying of the lease, and the legal notice fee - \$100.00 (more or less). (Materials may be furnished by the Department and billed to the lessee.)

There is a 50 acre minimum and 200 acre maximum per bid. It is the policy of the Department of Agriculture that lease be square or rectangular in shape.

Notice of the application is advertised by the Commissioner of Agriculture for one day in a newspaper having a daily circulation in the town or city where the oyster grounds are located and on the Department of Agriculture's website. Advertisements must appear at least ten days before the date set for the bid opening. It is the policy of the Department of Agriculture that all new leases are posted to the DOA website on or before the 15th of the month with the bid opening the first week of the following month.

To see if there are any grounds currently open to the bid process, see [New Shellfish Bed Lease Opportunities](#)

Statistics

- Licensed Shellfish Harvesters 44
- Shellfish Harvest Vessels 110
- Licensed Seed Oystermen 21
- Licensed Seed Helpers 70
- Licensed Seed Boats 30
- Firms Licensed for Wholesale Shellfish Sales and Distribution 32

Shellfish Ground Revenue

The State Leasing Program consists of:

- 674 franchise oyster grounds (more than 100 years old) totaling 22,422 acres and generating annual revenue of \$88,808.48.
- 326 Shellfish leases totaling 30,669.07 acres averaging \$25.63 per acre and generating \$ 827,856.24 in annual revenue.

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