

More Oysters?

Chesapeake Bay oysters (*C. virginica*) are a delicious delicacy and a major source of economy for many people in the bay watershed. Today, there are not as many oysters as there were in the past. In the mid 1800's, watermen from New England came to oyster in the bay's waters so that they could supply their area with oysters. The influx of the New England watermen competing with the already large fleets of Chesapeake Bay watermen fishing for oysters lead to a huge decline in the oyster population within the bay. Then, in the 1950's, scientists discovered that two disease, MSX and Dermo, were affecting the bay oysters. These two diseases were killing many of the oysters.

Scientists began to look for ways to bring our oyster population back to its original state. They began to research the idea of making the Chesapeake Bay oyster disease resistant. They also looked at the introduction of oysters from other parts of the world. The scientists at VIMS (the Virginia Institute of Marine Science) discovered that the Suminoe oysters grow faster than the native oyster in high salinities of the Chesapeake Bay and are resistant to the disease of MSX and Dermo. In taste tests, most people couldn't taste the difference between the two oysters. Because of these studies, the Seafood Council of Virginia has for the last two years secured permits from the Virginia Marine Resource Commission to grow sterile Suminoe oysters in controlled environments within the bay. Five Virginia counties have already submitted resolutions to the state to begin stocking non-sterile oysters and this measure is supported by many Virginia watermen.

Maryland scientists, on the other hand, are asking for more studies on the affects of the Suminoe oyster in the Bay ecosystem, the potential impacts on the oyster industry, alternative solutions to the over-harvesting of oysters and the surviving native oyster population.

Your job is to recommend whether stocking of sterile oysters should continue. Secondly, recommend whether fertile exotic oysters should be introduced in the Bay. Identify some of the benefits and risks of these possible introductions and consider each of the stakeholders involved.