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CHARLES H. BRONSON, COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE

florida aquaculture

Governor Appoints Charles H. Bronson New Commissioner of Agriculture

Governor Jeb Bush announced the appointment of Senator Charles H. Bronson as Florida's Agriculture Commissioner, a position in which he will serve through the end of the current term in January 2003. He will replace Interim Commissioner Terry L. Rhodes, who will return to her previously held position as assistant commissioner. Bronson's term will begin effective Monday, May 14, 2001.

"Charlie has been immersed in the agricultural issues of this state all of his life. His knowledge was cultivated through his family's agricultural heritage that dates back to the 1600s, as well as through his service to the state," said Governor Bush. "As a Senator, and as a member and chairman of numerous commissions and committees, his dedication to Florida's agricultural resources has been continually evident. Charlie's tremendous experience and expertise will be an incredible asset to the department and the people of Florida."

As Commissioner, Bronson will direct the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' statewide efforts to safeguard the public and support Florida's agricultural economy through: the inspection and testing of food commodities; consumer protection programs aimed to reduce unfair and deceptive business practices; assisting Florida's farmers and agri cultural industries with the production and promotion of agricultural products; and conserving and protecting the state's agricultural and natural resources by reducing wildfires and managing public lands.

Aquaculture Registrations Soar

Aquaculture Certificates of Registration for the 2000-01 registration year are up over last year. During 1999-2000, 849 aquaculturists were certified by the Division of Aquaculture. This year, 903 farmers are currently registered. The increase in registrations can be explained by both increased interest in aquaculture and recognition by farmers of the benefits of the program.

Shellfish producers make up 56% of the certified farms, 21% are ornamental producers and 17% produce food fish with the remainder producing live rock, alligators and bait. Certified farms are found in 62 of the state's 67 counties, with 22% of the certified farms in Levy County, 11% in Dixie County, and 10% in Hillsborough County.

Florida Statute requires that all aquaculturists in the state be certified by the Department. In order to be recognized as aquaculture and be entitled to all the benefits of other agriculture ventures, farmers must complete an aquaculture certification application. Certified aquaculturists must comply with Aquaculture Best Management Practices to ensure compliance with the state's environmental goals.

Current producers have received renewals for the July 1, 2001-June 30, 2002 certification year. To receive an application for a new farm or to get more information, contact Ceda Rudd at 850-488-4033 or ruddc@doacs.state.fl.us.

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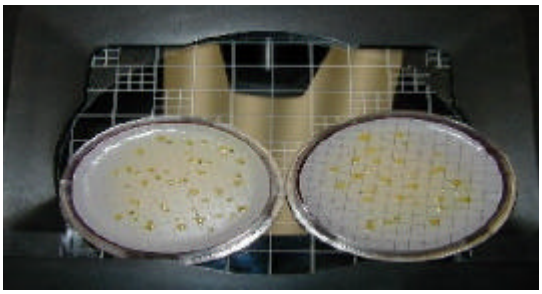
FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

DIVISION OF AQUACULTURE

Division Investigates New Technology



At the 1996 Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC), a request was made to allow the use of a membrane filtration procedure as an alternative to the current multiple tube fermentation procedure for the quantification of fecal coliform bacteria in shellfish growing waters. The ISSC Microbiological Committee recommended that an existing Environmental Protection Agency membrane filtration method, mTEC, could serve as the alternative procedure and was worthy of consideration for incorporation in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program.

Beginning in January 2001, the Division's Apalachicola Shellfish Center began a comparative study between mTEC and the current multiple tube fermentation procedures. Typical appearance of the results and equipment used is shown in these pictures. The mTEC method (top picture) costs about $.50 per sample for materials, requires about 25 percent of the current space that is devoted to the multiple tube fermentation and can be prepared one and a half times faster than the current method. Multiple tube fermentation (bottom picture) costs $2.00 per sample and requires the space and time mentioned. Both methods produce results in 24 hours. Two disadvantages have been found for mTEC: high coliform numbers or excessive turbidity require splitting the sample into two runs.

During January through March, 993 samples collected under various environmental conditions were evaluated. Results were very favorable and revealed a strong correlation between the methods. The Apalachicola Shellfish Center analyzes about 20,000 water samples per year. Adoption of the mTEC method could save approximately 75 percent in material cost and increase the number of samples that could be run.

The study will continue through the year with the collection of enough data to determine differences in classification of shellfish harvesting areas. The ISSC is to meet again in July 2001, where the preliminary results of this study will be presented. For additional information, please contact Tom Hudson at hudsont@doacs.state.fl.us.

Bob Crawford Regional Agriculture Center Opens

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has opened the Bob Crawford Regional Agriculture Center located at 605 East Main Street, Bartow, Florida 33830.

The Department's Division of Aquaculture will have three experienced professionals in this office: Mike Miltner-Environmental Supervisor and Chris Brooks and Wesrick Stephens, Environmental Specialists, respectively. The team will be responsible for an area of the state south of State Road 40. This dividing line runs from Yankeetown through Dunnellon, Ocala, Ocala National Forest, Holly Hill and ends in Ormond Beach.

Mike, Wesrick and Chris will work with the Division's Aquaculture Certification and Best Management Practices Program. They will be making site visits to all certified aquaculture facilities on a regular basis to assess compliance with Aquaculture Best Management Practices. Please welcome them on your farm and help them promote the growth of Florida aquaculture. If you should need assistance from the Bartow office, please call 863/519-8459 or stop by and visit.

Southwest Florida High Density Lease Requested

Preliminary assessment for new high-density shellfish leases in Southwest Florida has been triggered by strong local interest. The mayor of Everglades City requested that consideration be given to identifying a high-density lease area for clam culture. In response, the Division is planning to survey potential sites within a nearby conditionally approved management area. This area, Shellfish Harvest Area #66, is located southeast of Cape Romano and bounded by a line from the town of Goodland south along the Coon Key Channel to Cape Romano, west of a line from the Ferguson River to Indian Key Pass channel marker 7 and north of a line from Cape Romano to Marker 1K to Indian Key Pass channel marker 1.

Division representatives will also be meeting with regional fishermen to gain their insight as to potential lease locations. If the site evaluation appears promising, the Division will begin a long term study of grow out potential that will include trial plantings of seed clams. Results of this analysis and planting trial are not expected for a year or more. Contact Mark Berrigan (850/488-4033) or John Gunter (850/653-8317) for further information.

Alligator Harbor Focus of Unique Ecological Study

Low-intensity bottom culture of clams, such as is practiced in Florida, is suspected to be environmentally benign, with low impact on surrounding communities, but little published research confirms or refutes this claim. A novel opportunity exists in the vicinity of proposed aquaculture lease sites in Alligator Harbor in Franklin County. The area in question is rural and not currently used for commercial aquaculture. A high-density lease area is proposed, offering a window of time to evaluate the ecosystem prior to the initiation of commercial clam culture and monitor changes as that activity is initiated.

The goal of the work will be to examine the impact of clam culture in an aquaculture lease area on adjacent communities, which include shallow water soft bottoms, salt marsh, oyster bars and seagrass beds. The work will involve two main components: baseline data collection prior to the initiation of clam culture and quantification of impacts once leases are stocked. Information on the impact of clam culture will be used for improved management of aquaculture leases and, if necessary, to refine Florida's Aquaculture Best Management Practices.

Data collection will involve three tasks: (1) mapping and monitoring in the vicinity of the proposed leases, (2) resource assessment in the aquaculture lease area and adjacent sites,

Karen Metcalf deploys a grab at the study site

preliminarily and while commercial clam production is ongoing, and (3) description of physical parameters and water quality characteristics throughout the study.

The resource assessment will target three main areas; fish, benthos and plankton. Fish community surveys will be accomplished using seine and trawl in a random stratified design. Benthic sampling will be accomplished using a ponar grab and cores. Seagrass species composition and shoot density will be enumerated using quadrats. Plankton samples will be collected using a standard plankton net. Additionally, chlorophyll levels will be measured using a field flurometer to quantify phytoplankton abundance. Statistical analyses will be used to detect significant differences in species richness and abundance. Analyses will also quantify changes in aerial extent and density of seagrass.

For more information on the study, contact Karen Metcalf at 850/488-4033 or metcalk@doacs.state.fl.us.

Florida Drought Reduces Shellfish Area Closures

Management plans for the closure of shellfish areas are based on rainfall and river levels, because stormwater flow carries bacterial contamination from uplands into the coastal zone. Areas are also closed during emergency conditions, such as red tide blooms, hurricanes, and tropical storms. Shellfish areas are reopened for harvest when water quality sampling by the Division proves stringent public health criteria are met to ensure that shellfish are wholesome.

Of the 37 shellfish harvesting areas in Florida, three are classified Approved, 33 partially or entirely classified Conditionally Approved, and one is entirely Prohibited. These are managed every day of the year.

The number of days closed for harvesting in each shellfish area, so far this year (January 1 through May 8), was 42 percent less than the average number of days closed for the first half of the previous five years (1996 through 2000). Areas have been open for shellfishing more this year because of the continued drought and a decrease in red tide blooms. Total rainfall so far this year has been 11.7 inches, compared with a 10-year average (1991 through 2000) of 25.6 inches; this is 46 percent less rainfall than in previous years.

Florida Region	Days Closed (2001)	5-year Ave. Days Closed	Total Rainfall (2001)	10-year Average Rainfall
Western Gulf	265	617	14.6	35.9
Central Gulf	263	472	15.3	26.7
Big Bend	40	87	11.9	22.1
Southern Gulf	93	411	8.4	20.6
Atlantic Coast	105	236	8.5	22.9
Statewide	774	1,828	11.7	25.6

Division Audits Lease Provisions

The Division of Aquaculture is auditing aquaculture leases (shellfish and live rock) as required by state law to insure compliance with the lease provisions. Mr. Kamen Miller will be auditing leases to confirm that farms are appropriately marked, effectively cultivated, all special lease conditions have been met and that each lease holder and subleaseholder has an Aquaculture Certificate of Registration. Contact Kamen Miller at 850/488-4033 for information.

Oyster Reef Rebuilding Capacity Increased

Division staff at the Apalachicola Shellfish Center have geared up to plant oyster cultch. They have finished outfitting a recently purchased shell barge with water pumps and engine. The new 600 cubic yard barge will compliment the existing 450 cubic yard barge and increase the carrying capacity of shell to Bay and Escambia Counties by 130%.

ASMFC Working on Aquaculture Code

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), as funded by the National Marine Fisheries Service, is developing a set of guidelines for commercial aquaculture. The code will be patterned after technical guidelines released by the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO). The intent of the ASMFC code is to provide regulatory and management guidance for the Atlantic Coast (Maine to Florida).

The Division of Aquaculture strenuously objected to this project based on three arguments. The ASMFC, as a fisheries management council, has no role or mandate in regulation of commercial aquaculture. Much of the information that will be generated has already been published in a variety of forms. Any code that emulates the general nature of the UN-FAO document would not be of value to the Atlantic Coast States.

Industry and state agencies (agriculture and fishery oriented) are working on a draft. The final document is scheduled for completion by early 2002. Contact Jeffery Brust, ASMFC, 202/289-6400 for information.

Division of Aquaculture

The Division of Aquaculture is the newest division within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and was created by the Florida Legislature in 1998. Primary responsibilities include managing 1.5 million acres of coastal waters for the harvest or culture of wholesome shellfish, implementing the National Shellfish Sanitation Program through periodic inspection of shellfish processing plants and product, issuing submerged sovereign land leases for the culture of shellfish or live rock, certifying all legitimate aquaculturists through an annual registration and implementing a program of Aquaculture Best Management Practices to meet the State of Florida's environmental goals.

The aquaculture and shellfish industry can acquire information through a variety of means. The Division can be contacted by telephone, 850/488-4033 or 488-5471, or fax 850/410-0893. Tallahassee and the six district office hours are open five days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. District offices are located in Apalachicola, Bartow, Cedar Key, Murdock, Palm Bay, Panama City and Pensacola. Internet users can visit the Division's web site at http://www.FloridaAquaculture.com.

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