



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Virginia Posts Largest Oyster Harvest Since 1987

*2012-2013 Oyster Harvest Jumps almost 60 Percent from
Previous Year*

**Virginia Oyster Totals Grow From 23,000 Bushels in 2001 to
406,000 Bushels in 2013; Dockside Value Increases From \$575,000
to More than \$16.2 Million in Same Period**

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****Over Past Four Years, Commonwealth Has Invested Record \$3 Million in Oyster Restoration Efforts****

RICHMOND – Governor Bob McDonnell announced today that Virginia’s most recent oyster harvest has greatly exceeded recent years, reaching the highest level since 1987. The 2012-2013 harvest of 406,000 bushels was also 60 percent greater than just one year prior. The oyster recovery has taken place as the McDonnell Administration has led efforts to invest in the job-creating industry, which had an economic value of \$42.6 million last year. The \$2 million for oyster restoration included in the current budget is the greatest appropriation for the sector in Virginia history.

“This is very gratifying news, even better than I’d hoped,” Governor McDonnell remarked. “Good management has allowed us to put Virginia’s exceptional oysters on dinner plates around the world, creating good jobs, and generating new revenue for our state. Today’s announcement should also remind consumers everywhere to grab some delicious Virginia oysters next time they’re at dinner or in the store; thanks to Virginia’s sound management practices there are more for everyone to enjoy.”

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission’s harvest data showed 406,000 bushels of oysters were harvested in the 2012-2013 season, up from 257,000 bushels harvested in the previous year. This is an almost 60 percent increase from year to year.

The harvest boom came from both wild-caught oysters and from dramatically increased yields in oyster aquaculture operations on privately leased water bottoms.

The agency had projected Virginia’s oyster harvest last year potentially could reach 320,000 bushels but the year-end numbers revealed the harvest was, in fact, a whopping 406,000 bushels. Of that, 149,000 bushels were harvested from public oyster grounds and another 257,000 bushels were harvested from privately leased oyster grounds.

“We had high expectations for the oyster harvest, but this is substantially better than we dared to hope,” said VMRC Commissioner Jack Travelstead. “This year’s oyster season opened last month and the initial reports we’re hearing indicate we’re off to a very good start. The oysters being caught are big, tasty, and plentiful.”

The previous year’s (2011-2012) harvest totaled 124,000 bushels from public oyster grounds and another 133,000 bushels from oyster aquaculture operations.

“Over the past 12 years, the oyster harvest in Virginia has exploded from 23,000 bushels in 2001 to 406,000 bushels in 2013,” said Doug Domenech, Virginia’s Secretary of Natural Resources. “In that time, the dockside value of the oyster harvest increased from \$575,000 to more than \$16.2 million.”

The ripple effects through the economy from last year's unexpectedly large oyster harvest resulted in an estimated \$42.6 million in economic value, using a multiplier of 2.63 on a dockside value of \$16.2 million, a formula established by the late Dr. James Kirkley, a well-respected Virginia Institute of Marine Science seafood industry economist.

The state's oyster harvest is poised to increase even further, if weather and other environmental factors remain unchanged, due to this year's historic \$2 million investment in oyster replenishment. This is a program in which empty oyster shells are spread on state-owned public oyster grounds to provide habitat so naturally occurring oyster larvae can attach to the shells during spawning and grow to form new adult oysters that reach market size in roughly three years.

"This investment provides significant ecological and economic benefits, and will present consumers with more delicious, high-quality Virginia oysters in the years to come," said Anthony Moore, Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources, who leads the restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay. "This is substantial progress for the health of the Bay, for oyster-loving consumers and for watermen in this difficult economy."

A single adult oyster can purge up to 50 gallons of water a day. Oyster reefs provide important forage and refuge habitat for invertebrates, as well as juvenile crabs and finfish species. VMRC estimates every \$1 spent by the state to plant oyster shells yields \$7 in economic benefits in the form of larger harvests and increased jobs for oyster harvesters, shuckers, and packing houses.

General Fund appropriations for oyster replenishment funding have ranged from zero to as much as \$1.3 million over the past two decades, and have never surpassed the \$2 million allocated to the program in the 2014 state budget. The appropriation was proposed by Governor McDonnell and approved by the Virginia General Assembly earlier this year.

"Good fisheries management, prudent investment, and a business-friendly regulatory environment has put us in the most satisfying position of seeing a remarkable resurgence of Virginia's oyster industry," said Kim Huskey, executive director of the Virginia Seafood Council. "This is very good news, but more work needs to be done."

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