

Governor re-appoints professor, alum to state advisory board

By David Malmquist

(September 4, 2013) Governor Bob McDonnell has re-appointed Professor Roger Mann of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science to a second three-year term on the Commonwealth's Aquaculture Advisory Board.

Also re-appointed was A.J. Erskine, who earned his Master's degree from William & Mary's School of Marine Science at VIMS in 2003. Erskine, past-president of the Virginia Seafood Council, is currently Aquaculture Manager and Field Scientist for Bevans Oyster Company and Cowart Seafood Corporation.

"Roger and A.J.'s service on the Governor's board is a great example of our long history of advisory service to the Commonwealth," says VIMS Dean and Director John Wells. "The board's continuing efforts to facilitate sustainable aquaculture in Virginia's coastal waters benefit both our environment and our economy."

The General Assembly established the seven-member Aquaculture Advisory Board in 1992 to advise the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services on policy matters related to the rearing and harvest of fish and shellfish in controlled environments. Virginia's main aquaculture species include hard clams and oysters in saltwater; and tilapia, catfish, hybrid striped bass, prawns, and rainbow trout in fresh. VIMS scientists have developed the hard-clam culture techniques and disease-resistant, genetically improved oyster strains that now allow for sustainable and profitable aquaculture in Virginia's waters.

Mann, head of the Molluscan Ecology Program at VIMS, brings a scientific perspective to the Board, with more than 30 years of research into shellfish ecology and restoration. "Intensive oyster culture in Chesapeake Bay offers enormous opportunities for economic growth," says Mann, "but it also poses unusual biological and management challenges. As oyster aquaculture continues to expand in Virginia, we continue to work with local oyster farmers and resource managers to develop best management practices that will optimize oyster growth and profitability while sustaining ecosystem health."

VIMS' most recent survey of oyster and clam farming in Virginia shows these activities had an economic impact of more than \$81.2 million and provided 925 jobs in 2012. Harvested products are available at restaurants, farmers' markets, and through agricultural cooperatives throughout the state.

Erskine, who studied the reproductive biology of "triploid" oysters for his Master's degree, says "significant industry investment combined with sound science from our academic partners will result in profitable and sustainable oyster aquaculture in Chesapeake Bay."

Other members of the Aquaculture Advisory Board are Robert Bloxom, Jr., owner of Egret Point Seafood in Mappsville; Dr. Lynn Blackwood, president of the Virginia Aquaculture Association and the Virginia Aqua-



VIMS professor Roger Mann.

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Farmers Network; Andy Drewer, co-owner of Shore Seafood in Saxis; Martin Gardner, director of business development at Blue Ridge Aquaculture in Martinsville; and Wec Terry, co-owner and operator of Terry Brothers Seafood in Willis Wharf.

Tom Murray, Associate Director of Advisory Services at VIMS and Karen Hudson, a commercial shellfish aquaculture extension specialist in Virginia Sea Grant's Marine Extension Program at VIMS, serve on the Board's Policy Advisor/Technical Committee. The board's secretary is Robins Buck, project manager of VDACS' Agribusiness Development Services.



Oyster Research: VIMS researcher Nate Geyerhahn retrieves oyster bags from the York River. VIMS is a leader in efforts to develop disease-resistant oyster strains for use in oyster restoration and aquaculture in Chesapeake Bay. Photo by David Malmquist.