



PRESS RELEASE

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Signups Announced for Oyster Aquaculture Partnership Project in the Chesapeake Bay

Richmond, VA – Oyster growers in Virginia’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay can now apply for \$260,000 in funding through USDA’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to help restore oyster beds on private shellfish grounds.

This unique project expanded a successful six-year collaboration between USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), and the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to create habitat for oysters, fish, and other wildlife. The multi-year initiative will provide \$776,284 in dedicated RCPP funding and resources to support Bay water quality improvements by restoring about 40 acres of privately leased oyster beds.

“Virginia has long depended on oysters produced on private ground for a substantial portion of its oyster harvest,” says Andrew Button, VMRC Department Head, Conservation and Replenishment. “Over 130,000 acres of bottom are currently under lease by private individuals. This continued partnership will help to ensure that both oyster production and the associated ecological benefits of increased habitat continue to expand on private bottom in Virginia.”

VIMS has extensive experience providing technical assistance to Virginia growers and will partner with VMRC to help oyster farmers locate the best site(s) and shell sources for oyster bed restoration on their leases. VIMS’ dedicated extension specialist will also facilitate outreach to communities and agency representatives to promote environmentally friendly practices in the state’s shellfish aquaculture industry.

Producers who receive services from the Accomac, Chesapeake, Gloucester, Quinton, Smithfield, Tappahannock, and Warsaw NRCS Service Centers may be eligible to participate in this project. Interested individuals must submit a signed VMRC pre-approval form and complete an application with NRCS by **October 19, 2018** to be considered for FY 19 funding. If all funds are not obligated, the next deadline will be **November 2, 2018**.

“Through this strong partnership, NRCS has been able to focus more dedicated dollars and technical assistance to put growers back into production in areas that have remained fallow for years,” said NRCS State Conservationist Jack Bricker. “This new, improved approach to aquaculture yielded 14 contracts for \$280,000 in the last fiscal year alone.”

RCPP matches a federal investment with state and private capital to advance natural resource conservation and support agricultural production. For more information on Virginia RCPP projects, visit www.va.nrcs.usda.gov. To learn more about VMRC projects/activities, visit www.mrc.virginia.gov/Shellfish_Aquaculture.shtm.

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