

FLORIDA'S ECONOMY IS EXPANDING Under the Sea

Florida Sea Grant and UF/IFAS Extension are providing the information needed to help Florida's citizens and visitors appreciate the diversity, innovation and economic importance of the state's aquaculture industry.

It's easy to visualize citrus crops, fields full of vegetables and cattle herds when Florida's agriculture industry is mentioned. But what comes to mind with Florida's aquaculture? Most people picture fish and plants being grown and sold as food items.

The inability of wild seafood harvests to keep up with the demand for seafood and other aquatic food products has motivated growers to increase the culture of food from our oceans. Indeed, the Florida commercial aquaculture industry has long been recognized as one of the most diverse in the nation, with a "pond gate" harvest value of \$70 million associated with dozens of species according to recent USDA statistics.

Molluscan Shellfish Culture a Big Success

One of the state's most dramatic success stories has been in the culture of clams. Hard clams are grown on nearshore, submerged leases off several areas of the state's coast. In addition to the hundreds of leases that now exist, there are many spin-off businesses that have developed in support of the clam aquaculture industry.

For instance, there are hatchery operators who produce seed for growers, seamstresses who make clam bags, boat builders who specialize in clam work skiffs, and manufacturers who produce harvesting and processing equipment. Shellfish wholesalers purchase clams from growers, add value, and distribute to markets nationwide. The industry also provides local employment, such as processing plant workers and truck drivers.

Florida Sea Grant and IFAS Extension specialists conducted a study of the economic contribution associated with the Florida clam industry in 2012. Highlights of the study include:

- Sales by growers to wholesale dealers totaled \$12.3 million and sales by dealers totaled \$19.5 million.
- From production site to the final buyer, \$21.9 million in added value was generated.
- The clam culture industry supported 543 jobs and generated \$14.7 million in labor income.



