

## MANAGEMENT OF THE OYSTER RESOURCES<sup>1/</sup>

By J. S. Darling \*

Oyster producers and distributors are now able to devote more time and thought to the fundamental problems of production and distribution than at any time in recent years, and the fundamental problem of oyster culture which requires careful thinking at all times by oyster producers, in my opinion, is the relationship between public and private management of oyster-producing areas.

I do not desire to advocate at this time a change in the status quo of these conditions as they now exist in the several States, but to point out certain facts from my own experience in Virginia where they exist side by side. There is much that can be done by both private planters and the State to improve conditions. There is too little real scientific management of either private beds or public rocks. Too frequently, planting is haphazard and complete records are not carefully kept. Whether the oyster grounds are privately or publicly owned, there

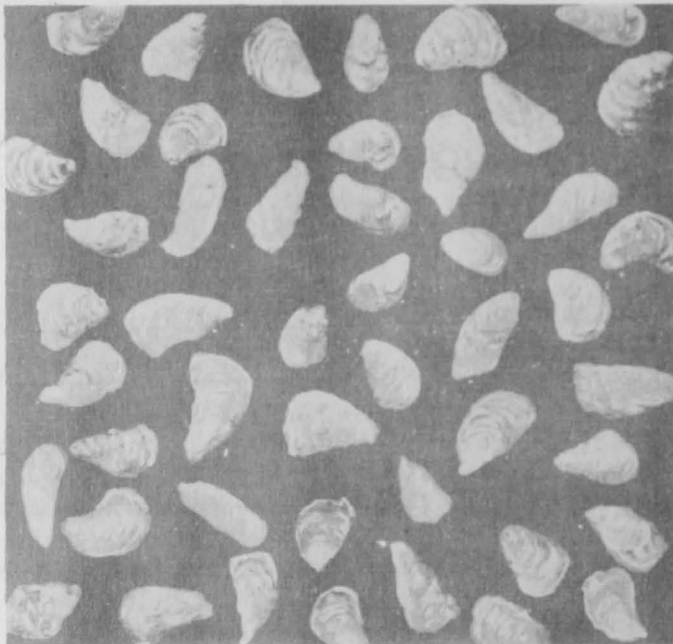


FIG. 1<sup>2/</sup> - YIELD FROM ONE SQUARE YARD OF CULTIVATED GROUND (1,000 BUSHELS PER ACRE).

should be a challenge to the operator to determine how, where, and when the best results can be obtained. This, in many instances, can only be secured by a trial and error method, but if production is to be increased, the results should be carefully recorded and studied. In my opinion, this is particularly needed in States such as Virginia where the seed beds are publicly owned and the growing areas under cultivation are, to a large extent, privately leased, but it holds true elsewhere where private ownership may be the only tenure in effect or where State ownership of oyster grounds producing both seed and market stock may predominate.

What can be done? What can the oyster planters and packers do? The oyster planter can make test plantings of shells on grounds which he now leases or owns, or can acquire new areas which appear to be suitable for developing into suitable areas on which to plant shells. In many sections of the country, such as Virginia, shell planting has been largely neglected because of the ease with which seed could be purchased from the public rocks. The planter can also intensify his search for suitable growing grounds not now under lease, and when secured, make carefully controlled plantings to determine the value of these hitherto untried and unknown beds. These are two obvious suggestions which are as old as the oyster industry

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<sup>2/</sup> Square represents one square yard.

itself, but which I believe have not been carried out as generally as they should have been in recent years. Other methods to increase and improve the supply of oysters by the planters themselves will undoubtedly occur to many and add to this the many greatly needed improvements in sanitary handling, shipping, and methods of product distribution which will insure the quality and increase the demand for oysters. There is indeed more than enough for the oyster planter and packer to do.

What can the Federal and State Governments do? The Federal Government primarily protects the public's interest, but the welfare of the industry is also a matter of public interest as we are a part of the economic structure of the country. So industry and Government should work together. The Government's interest is in part regulatory and the search for improvements here should continue. Where State governments actually own large areas comprising the "rocks, beds, and shoals of the Commonwealth", as in Virginia and Maryland, their governments assume a serious responsibility for the care and development of natural resources from which, in part, it debars private industry and initiative. If public oyster rocks are not scientifically managed and controlled, public confidence in the State's ability to do so is undermined and the public itself deprived of the benefits which might accrue to it under more efficiently operated private control. Here again there are obvious answers to what the State as owner and operator should do. With all the resources available to the State, it is in a position to make test plantings of shells and oysters, open and close areas at various seasons of the year under strictly controlled conditions, and above all, keep careful records of seed and market oysters removed from the public rocks for careful study and analysis. There are important policies to be determined and specific projects without number which

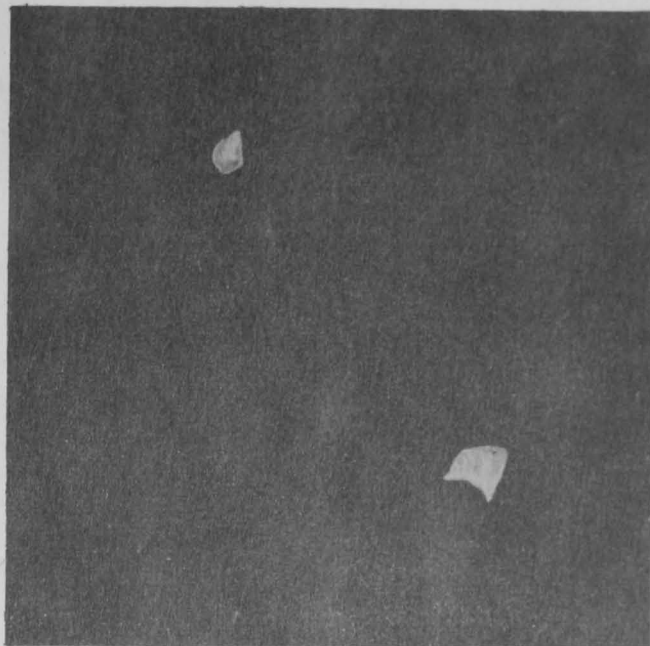


FIG. 2<sup>1</sup> - YIELD FROM ONE SQUARE YARD OF SEVERELY DEPLETED UNCULTIVATED ROCK (11 BUSHELS PER ACRE).

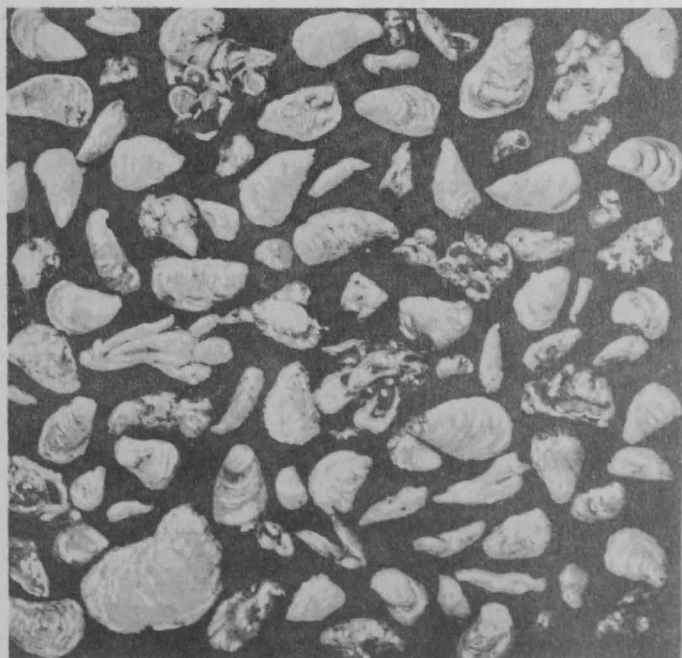


FIG. 3<sup>2</sup> - YIELD FROM OVERCROWDED UNCULTIVATED ROCK (3,000 BUSHELS PER ACRE). SIZE AND QUALITY VARY, COSTING THE OYSTERMAN MUCH VALUABLE TIME IN CULLING.

could be undertaken by State regulatory authorities with a view to increasing the supply of cultivated oysters.

<sup>2</sup>/ Square represents one square yard.

In my section of the country, there has been far too much reliance on nature's bounty and too little scientific experimentation. Many old oyster planters who have been in the business a long time, and their fathers before them, are too ready to accept the fact that there are many things we do not know about oyster culture as final, and make no serious effort to determine why oysters are fat one year and poor the next, or why, when the depletion of certain areas continues, it is regarded as an act of God about which nothing can be done. Such a policy will result in nothing less than further reduction in production and an eventual gradual decline until the oyster is economically in the same class as the diamond-back terrapin. Therefore, it is urged upon all concerned with oyster culture, oyster planters and packers, and all State and Federal officials, a continuous program of careful experimentation and research to rescue from further decline an industry which has potentially great possibilities of tremendous development and expansion.



### NEW FISHERY FILM AVAILABLE

Basic Net Mending, a new U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service educational film, became available for distribution on September 1. The film is intended for vocational use by persons in the fishing industry.

The motion picture is in 16 mm. color and sound, and runs about 12 minutes. The outdoor scenes were filmed in New Bedford, Mass., with Captain Paul Green of that city demonstrating the proper methods of mending torn fishing nets.

Organizations which wish to borrow prints of this film should send their requests to the Division of Information, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington 25, D. C. Because the number of prints is limited, requests for booking the film should be made as far in advance as possible. No charge is made for the use of the film.

Other recently-released fishery motion pictures which are available are: Filleting and Packaging Fish (in two parts) and Retailing Fish.

The Service is now producing the Maine Sardine Industry and the North Pacific Halibut Industry, and will announce the release dates of these educational films within the next few months.