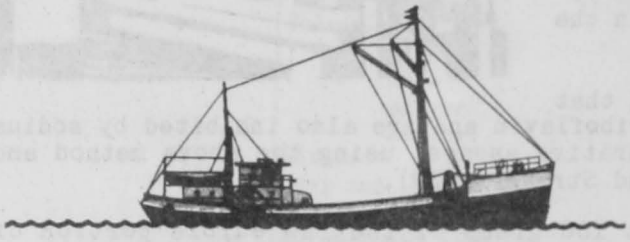
SECTIONAL REVIEWS

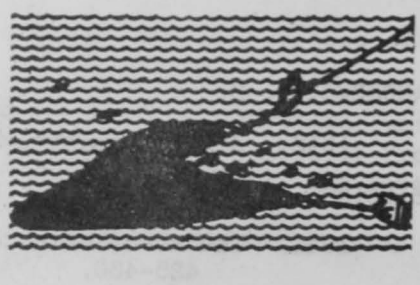
Middle Atlantic

CONDITIONS: Cold weather and rough seas restricted the production of fish in the New York-Connecticut area during January. Even the large draggers were curtailed in their activities and those that had been operating off Long Island were unable to work any complete week. However, the surf-clam fleet reported advantageous landings during this period. Many of the boats of this fleet have installed pumps and jets which force water through the clams while they are being dredged, thus eliminating much of the mud and debris which normally has collected in the dredge before the clams were lifted on board the boats. Since this process is only in the experimental stage, it is too early to make positive statements regarding its effectiveness. It appears, however, from a comparison of the catches of the vessels, that those equipped with pumps and jets doubled production per unit of effort. The cost of each set of apparatus, including motor necessary for the set-up, averages 500 dollars, according to the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist reporting the development.



There is a great deal of speculation as to the effect this new process will have on the surf-clam industry. Before its introduction, the entire industry was distressed over the decline in production. They feared that the clam beds already in use were being depleted to such an extent that too great an effort would soon be required of a vessel to bring in a satisfactory quantity and that the fleet would return to dragging and party-boat operations. Quota limitations were recently placed on boats equipped with pump and jet, in the anticipation that their increased production would overtax the capacity of the shore plants.

NEW JERSEY: Weather conditions not conducive to favorable fishing operations curtailed the landings of fish by otter trawl and line trawl fishermen during January, according to the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist reporting from New Jersey. Although catches have not been appreciably lower than the general landings for similar periods in previous years, the catches of cod by the line trawlers were below expectations. This was offset by landings of cod by the draggers. Production of whiting and ling (red hake) compensated for the poorer landings of other species and prices remained consistently good.

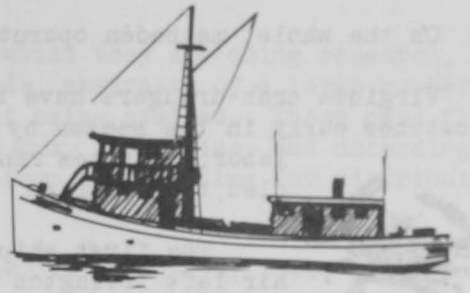


A factor contributing to curtailing of landings was the sinking of one fishing craft and the breaking down at sea of two others.

Due to shortages of materials and labor, many of the canning and reduction plants have not reached their anticipated production. Labor costs have been quite high, and production has been curtailed due to occasional work stoppages caused by wage disagreements.

Chesapeake

VIRGINIA: The menhaden season in Virginia ended about October 15, despite desires of the plant operators to continue longer, the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialist in Virginia has reported. If they had been able to operate through November, as is the custom, it is probable that production would have been greater, because schools of menhaden covering many acres were seen off the North Carolina Coast at that time. Lack of crews, however, forced the factories to suspend operations when man after man quit his job. Apparently, oyster prices were too alluring.



Another factor substantially limited production. In 1945, only 14 menhaden fishing vessels were operated in Virginia as compared with 21 in 1944. This was due to good fishing on the Atlantic Coast close to factories in other States, where Virginia vessels could land their catches more conveniently. Because of the lack of vessels, two of Virginia's seven menhaden factories did not operate. A total of 116,348,000 menhaden was landed compared with 108,434,000 in 1944, however. As the higher figure was the catch of one-third less boats working a shorter season than in 1944, an increase in natural supply was indicated.

According to reports, about two-thirds of the catch was taken in the Atlantic Ocean and one-third in the Chesapeake Bay. Nearly all of the fish caught in the Bay by menhaden vessels since 1936 have been taken in the North Channel area, which lies between Cape Charles and Cape Henry. Menhaden have not been found in the Bay proper in purse-seining quantities since they appeared in the Potomac River in 1936. At that time, it was possible for a boat to load up to half-a-million fish repeatedly from this source. Operators believe that military activity in various parts of the Bay in recent years, especially experimentation with explosives, may have made the fish stay away from the inner Bay and its tributaries.

Menhaden oil production was slightly higher in 1945 than in several preceding years. Virginia operators have speculated as to why oil content varies from year to year. Consensus is that fish from colder waters yield most oil, but that there are other conditions, such as the time of year and the direction of migration, that may have an important bearing on the matter. The average yield in Virginia for the year was between three and seven gallons per thousand fish. In past years, it has been known to reach as high as 14 gallons. The fish scrap yield, unlike oil yield, is generally consistent, averaging about 22 tons per 100 tons of fish.

Several factories start operating in early spring before purse-netting begins, in order to utilize scrap from alewife canneries. This scrap is processed along with menhaden caught in pound nets, for which, until the recent canning of such menhaden for food, there has been no other market. The price paid for these trap-caught menhaden, both by the canners and the factories, is low, about 3 dollars per thousand fish. It is estimated that it would cost more than that figure to catch them with vessel, crew, and purse-seine.

The oil obtained from the early season operations is from a combination of alewives and menhaden. It is customarily mixed with straight menhaden oil, even though its quality may be lower because of its darkness and high acid content. This, according to manufacturers, makes no difference in the price obtained, since all oil, mixed or unmixed, is purchased in accordance with an established analysis table.

On the whole, menhaden operators were satisfied with the season.

Virginia crab-dredgers have been greatly handicapped by the limitation put on catches early in the season by the buyers because of the scarcity of picking labor. Prices ranging from 5 to 6 dollars per barrel have dwindled to 3 dollars.

The first shipment of Virginia oysters to be transported by air left Irvington recently enroute to Chicago. Because of the lack of landing space for a cargo plane, the oysters had to be sent by truck to Washington, where they were put on board a Chicago-bound plane.

In an attempt to improve the effectiveness of oyster conservation laws, the governors of Maryland and Virginia were appointing three men each to meet on March 28 at Mt. Vernon.

KELP

The commercial utilization of the vast kelp (Macrocystis pyrifera) beds on the Pacific Coast, and of Laminaria digitata on the Atlantic Coast, was begun in a small way in 1912. This seaweed was at that time used in the production of potash for fertilizer and explosives. Bromine and iodine were recovered as byproducts. During the war in 1917-18, considerable money was spent in research to develop more economical methods for obtaining these products, since the shortage was acute. At the close of the war considerable progress had been made, but since imports of cheaper material could be obtained, most of the kelp plants closed. One or two remained in operation preparing fertilizer and dairy cattle food from the dried seaweed. It has since been found that the kelp contained alginic acid, which can be used in the manufacture of a material known as algin. This has a wide variety of uses, the most important of which is a stabilizer for ice cream and other dairy products. It is also valuable in the preparation of rubber articles, finishing of leather, waterproofing cement, fireproofing wood and other inflammable materials, treatment of boiler water, can-sealing compounds, water-base paints, dental-impression materials, and gaskets for airplane engines. This has grown into an industry of considerable importance, particularly during the present war, since many of the materials used by the armed forces contain algin.

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