

## SECTIONAL REVIEWS

### Chesapeake

OYSTERS: Mortality of oysters in a 100-square-mile section of upper Chesapeake Bay, ranging as high as 75 percent on certain bars in this area, has been disclosed by a joint survey, in which the Federal Government and the State of Maryland cooperated, the Fish and Wildlife Service reported on March 22.



The survey covered 44 major oyster bars in the upper part of Chesapeake Bay and was carried out by the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Maryland Departments of Tidewater Fisheries and of Research and Education.

Recent mortality on these bars, affecting both young and adult oysters, varied from 7 to 75 percent of all oysters present, and was found to be most severe in the northern part of the affected area, gradually decreasing toward the south.

Along the eastern shore, the affected grounds were found to extend from the uppermost bars, in the vicinity of Poole's Island, about 20 miles to the lower end of Kent Island, generally known as "Bloody Point." Along the western shore of the Chesapeake, oyster mortality was observed from the same uppermost limits of oyster growth as far south as Herring Bay. Oyster beds in the Bay proper are more seriously affected than those in the tributaries, it is reported.

Observations by State and Federal biologists disclosed that the salinity of the water in the upper Bay has been only one-half to one-third of normal during the past year and that this unfavorable condition is believed to be responsible for the heavy mortality of oysters in the upper part of the Bay. Daily records made at Solomons Islands show that, from July of last year to the present time, salinities have remained at the lowest level reached in the past nine years.

These unfavorable conditions, aggravated by heavy local rains last July and August, prevented the normal recovery of oysters after last summer's spawning season and also interfered with their feeding. As a result, oysters in these upper Bay areas were in poor condition last fall and were unable to withstand continued exposure to low salt concentrations.

Oysters in the vicinity of Poplar Island and in other places farther south apparently have not been injured and, judging from reports coming in from the Crisfield area, are in very good condition in the latter section.

State and Federal experts carefully explored the possibility that the present mortality might be caused by attacks of natural enemies of the oyster, by some organism associated with the oysters, or by a change in their environment other than lowered salinity. However, no evidence was found to support any of these possibilities.

Mortality was found to be equally heavy on natural oyster bars and on State planted beds, indicating that there was no association with planting and other oyster cultural operations.

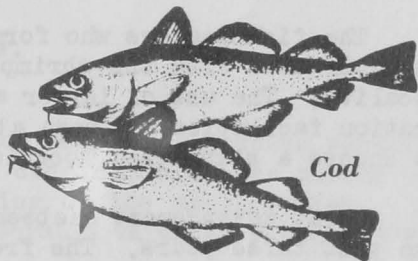
Experts of the Fish and Wildlife Service state that the present mortality of oysters is not an unusual phenomenon, high death rates among the oysters of the upper Chesapeake having occurred repeatedly during the past 38 years--in 1908, 1916, 1928, 1936, and 1943. In each instance, high mortality coincided with an abnormally high run-off of the Susquehanna River and low salinity of the Bay water.

It was recognized that conditions might improve in the near future as a result of the increase in water salinity which occurred during March, at a season when the salinity normally drops. Unless the run-off of the river suddenly rises, normal conditions should soon be restored.



## Middle Atlantic

**NEW JERSEY:** A recent canning and byproducts survey of the fishing industry of New Jersey indicated that landings of fresh fish were larger during February than is normal at this season, according to one of the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialists in the Middle Atlantic area. The increased landings of codfish by trawl line and otter trawl vessels were largely responsible for the increase in total production, although landings of ling and whiting by the otter trawl fleet were so large during February, that, on one or two instances, incoming vessels were compelled to wait as long as 12 or 14 hours until others were able to unload their catches. Some of this congestion, however, may be attributed to the small docks at certain points.



Preparations for the coming shad season have progressed favorably among pound-net and stake gill-net fishing firms. It is reported that about 65 or 70 stake gill-nets will be operated in Staten Island areas.

With the return of many skilled workmen from the Armed Services, the oyster shell industry is planning to reach nearly full time production by the end of the current season. However, their production may be curtailed after July or August, especially in Southern New Jersey, by the lack of shells, as the State plans to use most of the available shells in that area for planting purposes.



## South Atlantic and Gulf

Within the period of three years, certain definite trends which are an outgrowth of wartime economy, have become noticeable in the fisheries of the South, according to one of the Service's Fishery Marketing Specialists in the South Atlantic and Gulf area.



Modern shrimp packing plants are being built in the Gulf area. Now electrical and mechanical hoisting rigs unload vessels in much less time than the old hand rigs; metal conveyors bring the shrimp from dock to peeling or heading rooms after they have been thoroughly washed; metal picking tables have been improved; heads and shell are removed by uniformed women; clean washrooms are available; and separate supply rooms are maintained. The latter are stocked with ample replacement parts for all plant and vessel machinery, eliminating the necessity of long delays in getting plant machinery or vessel engines back into running condition. As time is a contributing factor in modern packaging of seafood, this supply and repair room is recognized as an essential part of the packing plant. These plants are divided into sections and operate smoothly, without the confusion and filth of a one-room plant.

The fish dealers who formerly moved up and down the Atlantic Coast and into the Gulf area with the shrimp migrations are now establishing themselves in one locality. The use of larger and faster vessels with greater capacity and refrigeration facilities has been a big factor in influencing the itinerant shrimp dealer to choose a stabilized location.

Great advancement has been made in the field of frozen fishery products during the past three years. The freezing of shrimp has already become the established practice of a majority of dealers, and larger quantities of oysters are also being frozen by shippers.

Compared with the seasonal production average of former years, the current shrimp season in the Gulf has been disappointing. Weather conditions have not been normal, and the fleet has been restricted to ports or to short trips the greater part of the season. However, it has been reported that the fall shrimping season in North Carolina was the best ever experienced in that State.

Experiments are under way in the Gulf area with vessels equipped with refrigeration facilities. These vessels circulate among fishing and shrimping craft, taking their load, or supplying ice and minor repair parts and equipment, thus enabling the craft to remain on the fishing banks for a longer time.

The fishing industry of the South Atlantic and Gulf areas is anticipating a better than average season, insofar as labor and equipment are concerned. The labor supply is not yet normal, but dealers have learned valuable lessons in labor savings and more efficient methods of handling seafoods during the war.

Some new equipment is being installed in old plants, and a few new plants are being erected, but in most instances, old equipment is being modernized and kept in first-class operating condition.

Many of the Gulf fishing vessels are in excellent shape because there has been ample time to make repairs during the extended periods of adverse weather conditions.

