

## Connecticut's shellfish industry is bouncing back

By Luther Turmelle Published 8:00 pm EST, Saturday, December 23, 2017

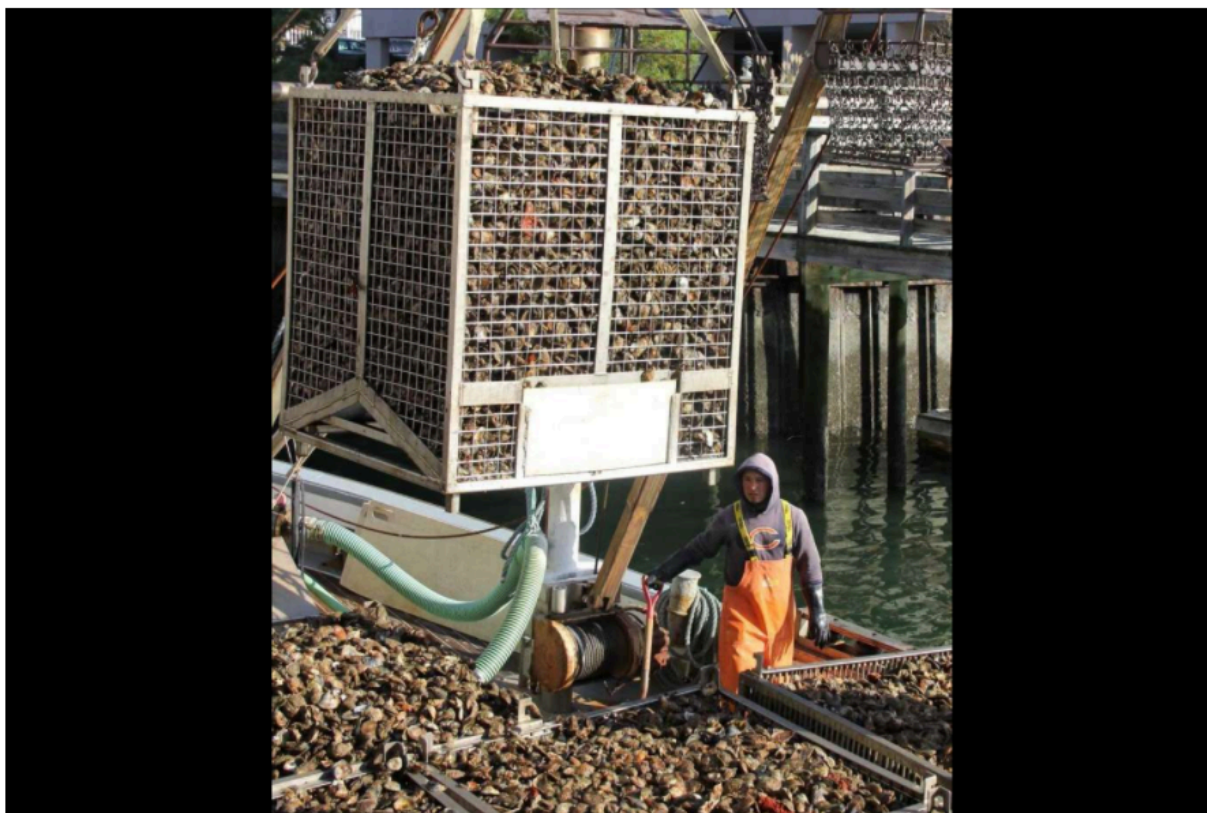


Photo: Judy Benson / Connecticut Sea Grant

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Some of the states \$30 million shellfish harvest is lifted onto the docks and into the processing facility at Norm Bloom & Son Oysters in Norwalk

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A recently released University of Connecticut report says between 2007 and 2015, the state's shellfish industry saw sales increase by nearly 100 percent.

Direct sales of oysters and clams in 2015 were valued at just under \$30 million, according to the report. And according to Tessa Getchis, an aquaculture extension specialist at Connecticut Sea Grant, which is located on UConn's Avery Point campus, even better days are ahead for the industry.

“There’s been a resurgence of the industry,” Getchis said. “We’re still at a fraction of historical harvests. Long Island Sound has absolutely turned around, especially the eastern portion of it.”

Historically, much of the volume of Connecticut’s shellfish harvest has come from the western part of Long Island Sound, particularly off the coast of Norwalk, she said. But Getchis said the industry is seeing an increase in shelling fishing operations in eastern portions of Long Island Sound, near the mouth of the Thames River.

“We are seeing a lot of growth in smaller operations, businesses with one or two people,” she said. “They are producing a boutique type of oyster that can’t be found elsewhere. Because what they are producing is unique, the oysters are fetching a higher price, which is economically significant.”

The aquaculture industry has a significant multiplier effect on the economy in direct jobs on boats, aquaculture farms and in processing facilities, as well as indirect jobs in sales and distribution, according to the UConn report. More than 350 workers are employed in direct jobs at shellfish farms.

Getchis said Connecticut shellfishing operations are diversifying into new crops such as kelp, which is sold to make noodles.

Once, most Connecticut-grown aquaculture products were shipped to out-of-state markets in New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere. But now, more of the product is marketed locally here in Connecticut, she said.

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