The Massachusetts Shellfish Aquaculture Innovation Consortium awarded funding of $200,000.

Kingston, MA
Governor Deval Patrick, Senate President Therese Murray and Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian Bowles announced May 18th the awarding of $2.7 million in grants to help Massachusetts farmers compete in the marketplace.

Among the projects funded was the proposal submitted by SEMAC to establish the Massachusetts Shellfish Aquaculture Innovation Consortium (MSAIC), which included partners: the Northeast Massachusetts Aquaculture Center (NEMAC) at Salem State College, the Martha’s Vineyard Shellfish Group, the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association and collaborator Marine Biological Laboratory. The grant was one of the first to be awarded through the new Agricultural Innovation Center Concept within the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. (MA DAR)

This new program was created by the Legislature last year. There will be no physical center or staffing, the notion of Agricultural Innovation Centers is the creation of “virtual” centers, which with industry support, use grants to build partnerships between the MA DAR, other agencies and trade organizations. The overall goal is to develop a network that can work to best promote agricultural enterprises which are financially successful and sustainable.

The Governor noted that the largest of the grants at $1.5 million went to the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers Association, and he noted, “It is fully appropriate that the cranberry industry would be the centerpiece of the Agricultural Innovation Center’s first grant year,” said Governor Patrick. “It is in our best interests to keep the Massachusetts cranberry industry alive and well and thriving in the global marketplace. The $1.5 million provided by the Agricultural Innovation Center is the Commonwealth’s investment in making that happen.”

Shellfish farms were also viewed with a high level of importance, as the MSAIC proposal was provided the third highest level of funding for FY 2008 at $200,000.

As noted in the proposal, “Over the last decade the centers have worked cooperatively with one another and with the Massachusetts Aquaculture Association to promote the sustainable development of the overall shellfish culture industry. These efforts included research initiatives, technical assistance, alternate species development, implementation of best management practices, shellfish disease response, site assessment, industry research farms, marine water quality monitoring, library and web site information, industry support grants, marketing and public relations. As the programs evolved, it became more apparent that a statewide public/private multiple partnership approach to assist the cultured shellfish industry may now work best, and be more cost effective.” The MSAIC will now focus on achieving the seven objectives outlined in the proposal, and to that end the partners met in mid June to

Continued on page3

Shellfish Grower’s share in Red-tide Disaster Relief Assistance

“It was worth the wait,” said one grower, who just received his letter that he qualified for assistance under the Massachusetts 2005 Red-tide Disaster Relief program. “While it won’t make up for all that we lost, this will be a big help,” he added.

This sentiment is shared by many others in the shellfish industry, who are about to receive some financial assistance to help them recover from the Red-tide event of 2005. In the spring and early summer of that year, a total of 1,351,265 acres or 77.4% of the Commonwealth’s marine waters in 42 coastal communities were closed to shellfishing due to a massive red-tide event.

The closure impacted most growing areas, and many of our farmers were out of work for weeks. The effort to secure some type of assistance began with then Governor Mitt Romney’s declaration of a state of emergency on June 9, 2005, allowing the state to seek federal disaster aid for the shellfish industry. Soon after, on June 16, 2005, the Department of Commerce declared New England’s red tide outbreak a commercial fishery failure eligible for assistance under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. A year later, funding was finally obtained

Continued on Page 2
With shellfish farming, trying to figure out why something happened (or didn’t) could be termed ‘difficult at best’ given all the variables encountered when working in the marine environment. Often the events which initiated a problem and the need for a study have long since passed and the researcher is left only with the results and a lot of questions. Thus, one has to start by looking back at weather and water condition data, archived buoy reports and the like to get a sense what may have triggered the resulting situation. When researching a particular problem, it is not unusual to have a grower come along and say something like, “well one day last month the water was brown with this odd algae” or “there were all these little things swimming around.” Unfortunately, in most cases when asking the grower for more information, he or she often does not recall what day or other details.

The purpose of this tech talk piece is to make growers aware that observations made while working on their sites may be very useful and have the potential of providing an answer to a perplexing question. Thus, SEMAC staff decided that we would ask our growers, who do not already do so, to begin a log book or journal. This written record may benefit all of us, and of course, the log book will also be handy to record planting and harvesting information. Each time you go out to your site, note the time you arrive, what the weather is like, if you can record the water temperature, do so. Make note of the things you observe! Record the day the ice broke up on your site, the first time that year that you saw green crabs, the slowing down of growth, whatever! Here is our example of one type of daily log:

**Out to my site on April 30th at 6:30 AM, tide still dropping, with low tide occurring at 8:15AM. Water temperature was 62°. It was cloudy and a stiff NW wind was blowing right at us. Air temperature was 49°. A large raft of eider ducks was just offshore from my site. This is the latest I’ve seen eiders in this area since we have had our site. When we opened our trays we found the sign of a barnacle set. They were very small, and seemed to be only on the trays. There was also a fuzzy brown algae on the top trays. Neither the tiny dots of the barnacles or this fuzzy algae were here three days ago on the 27th. We also saw our first Japanese crab of the season. We sorted our oysters, and there were a few which seemed to have some slight new edge on them, but most did not show any growth yet. We left our sight at 9:40, the sun was beginning to peek through the clouds and the wind had slackened off. The eiders flew off, but we can see them flying along the flats just to our north.**

Continued on page 4

**Tech Talk**

“Helping with the Research”

When Congress passed the **Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery.** In the act, $5 million was designated to assist fishermen recover from severe economic impacts due to fisheries disasters declared in 2005. The states of Maine and Massachusetts were each provided with $2 million to address the impacts of the red-tide event. Of that, Approximately $1.9 million will be distributed to qualified applicants through the Red Tide Relief Program. While this is a significant amount, it can in no way fully compensate applicants for all lost wages resulting from the 2005 red tide disaster, estimated by Marine Fisheries to be more than $10 million.

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“Spit and Chatter”

I wanted to start this piece with “fellow aquaculturists”, but I heard something recently from a friend of mine. He said “you’re not an aquaculturist until you’ve killed a million”! With that in mind, I hope it will be a long time before we are ever officially dubbed aquaculturists, and if you know that you are an aquaculturist then I will just say thank you, for you are likely a legend and true pioneer of our industry.

Fellow Growers, I hope you have all seen favorable growing conditions thus far and pray that the impending heat of summer does not inhibit growth as it did for so many last year. We growers face daily, seasonal and annual conditions that make our lives and jobs so unique and challenging. Crabs, Tunicates, Drills, Gulls, Wind, Ice, Heat and Abundant weed mats can at any time create havoc in our processes. A newer threat is emerging and it is not born from the waters. This threat comes from the land and if it is prosperous and protected, with enough weight it may disrupt our efforts more so than ever thought imaginable. What I am alluding to is simply this; our industry is becoming increasingly more scrutinized than ever before.

Shellfish aquaculture has increased dramatically in our area in the last 10-15 years and with its increase so has its footprint and profile. We are more noticeable to the public eye, and I admonish you all to be mindful of the privilege that we have attained by being diligent and compliant in our culture practices. I also encourage you to be thoughtful to the neighbor and land owners, it is with their support that we are able to produce our crops and without localized public support we may be headed down a dead end road. In order for the shellfish aquaculture industry to be sustained and protected in coming times we also need to be organizationally minded. There are multiple organizations which have been created to benefit the individual grower and the industry as a whole; it is with contributing to these organizations that will enable this industry to have a voice at the local, state and federal levels of government as well as in the public domain. Please be encouraged to contribute to the organizations that have regularly worked together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together.

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MSAIC project said, “As the industry has grown, it’s become clearer to me that we need to recognize that Massachusetts shellfish farmers are facing the same problems and would benefit from working together. The Consortium is exciting because it formally pulls together a number of folks who have regularly worked together before to try and assist Massachusetts shellfish farmers with various issues like disease, new gear, developments in seed stocks, etc. The MSAIC gives us funding and makes us approach issues in a much more coordinated way.”

Cultured Oyster Fast Stats

Total world oyster culture production for 2005... 4.3 million tons

Total value of US Oyster Production for 2005...$102 million...$60 million in Pacific and other oysters

$42 million in Eastern oysters

Lead States in Oyster Production...Louisiana (Eastern oysters) 313 million pounds  Washington...(Pacific oysters) 38 million pounds

Total MA Oyster Production for 2005... 1.1 million pounds at $3.1 million

Lead MA towns in Oyster Production for 2005... Barnstable, Duxbury and Wellfleet

In just 200 words and using very little time, this hypothetical grower of our example provided a wealth of information, which may prove very valuable in the future. While this grower chose to write in a narrative style, bullets or phrases would work just as well. Remember if taking temperatures give the thermometer enough time to record an accurate reading. Also, you may want to check the water temperature at different locations on your site.

To encourage our growers to keep a log, SEMAC will provide on a first come, first served basis a limited number of pocket sized waterproof log books at cost, shirt pocket size $3.50, hip pocket size $4.00. Pocket thermometers will also be available at cost for $5.50. It is our hope that all our growers will begin to keep such a journal to record their observations. These observations while useful to the individual grower, as a way to document something for insurance purposes, check growth, etc, they also may be useful to all of us. Perhaps when we have some type of situation in the future, who knows, it may be the information from a grower’s log book which solves the puzzle.

Log books and thermometers will be available in mid-July. Contact Bill Burt at (508) 375-6702 for further information.