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CLAM STUDIES HELP FISHERIES OF TWO CONTINENTS

Days of plenty for the people of two continents who like hardshell clams seem to be in the making, according to information available at the Department of the Interior.

Two developments are climaxing years of hard work on the part of biologists of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service.

One is that a source of "seed" has been proved and can be developed. The other is proof that "seed" can be planted under conditions which will assure clams of the littleneck or cherrystone size a year after the spawning.

The story in brief is a victory over the numerous predators which have waxed fat at the expense of the hardshell clam, predators which attacked the clam at every cycle of development.

The big problem in hardshell clam propagation has been getting the seed. Oyster set could be secured in many places but not so with hardshell clams. The clam fishery was dependent entirely upon natural sequences, many of which were not so good.

Eight years ago, scientists at the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries' shellfish laboratory at Milford, Connecticut, began work on producing clam "seed" from parent clams held in the laboratory. That task has been successfully completed and a technique for captive culture has been devised. The laboratory-spawned clams have been planted in predator-protected areas and have thrived.

The result is that the Milford laboratory has shipped upwards to a million of these tiny creatures to various parts of the Atlantic coast to investigate their rates of growth and survival under widely different environmental conditions.

Clams--one-sixteenth of an inch long--which the Milford laboratory shipped to Florida State University for planting in warm Gulf waters under predator-free

conditions developed into two-and-a-half inch restaurant-size specimens in just a year. In colder areas it takes as long as three or four years for clams to make that growth.

The laboratory also has just recently shipped 150,000 small hatchery-bred clams to England and France for a new start in the clam fisheries in those countries.

Thus the long hours at the laboratories have not only shown the clam industry how to produce seed clams necessary for a stable fishery but have made it possible for the producer to put his plantings in areas which can be protected from predators.

Other research by the Bureau is perfecting control methods for clam predators and improving "fences" or barriers used to keep the predators away from the clam beds. Still other study is probing the effect of silting and other water conditions upon this important shellfish.

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