



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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Virginia's Oyster Harvesters are Busy Making the Holidays Tasty

*~ Thousands of bushels of high-quality oysters are being harvested by
hardworking watermen striving to meet the holiday demand. ~*

NEWPORT NEWS – Virginia's oyster harvesters are hard at work bringing oysters to market for the upcoming holiday season.

This year's supply of oysters is perfect for stews and stuffing, and they taste great fried, broiled or raw on the half shell.

"It is tough work out on the water in the cold, braving the winds and the weather to bring genuine Virginia oysters to the dinner table," said Commissioner John M.R. Bull of the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, which manages commercial fisheries. "This is a job the harvesters love, and a way of life to be appreciated and honored."

Oysters are being harvested from the James, Rappahannock and Great Wicomico rivers and from the Tangier Sound and the seaside of the Eastern Shore.

An estimated 600 harvesters are out on the water, and are expected to harvest thousands of bushels for the holiday by towing scrape and dredge gear behind their work boats or by using large, heavy hand tongs to pull the oysters from the water bottom. Small oysters are culled from the catch and returned to the water to allow them to grow to spawn a new generation for future harvests.

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Oyster farmers, known as aquaculturalists, are busy supplying the holiday oyster half-shell market while the harvesters focus on the wild oyster stock.

This year's oysters are high quality and are prized by consumers. They pair quite nicely with any number of high-quality Virginia wines.

"Oysters are always a holiday favorite and this year's supply comes from all over the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, in all different flavors for all different tastes," said Bull. "Virginia is the oyster capital of the East Coast and our oysters are harvested sustainably by the hardworking men and women in our seafood industry."

Over the past 12 years, the oyster harvest in Virginia has increased from 24,000 bushels in 2003 to an estimated 630,000 bushels last year.

The Virginia Marine Resources Commission also extended the commercial crab season by a month, until Dec. 20, so Virginians could enjoy fat and delectable pre-Christmas crabs. This was possible due to substantially improved stock abundance over the past two years.

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