



Lemonade Netarts Oysters 50¢

They told me the American Dream was dead. So to test the notion, I'm wringing any remaining life I can from it to create Nevør Shellfish Farm on Netarts Bay, Oregon.

I'm Travis Oja. Three years ago I was overcome by an obsession to become an oysterman. Growing up on the Oregon Coast—blue collar—cold and wet is what I usually did for fun, so oysters certainly seemed something I was capable of. But I

knew nothing of the industry. I didn't know the difference between cultch and spat, or what either was, really.

My quest to go a-oystering began. I absorbed everything oyster I could. Coming across a document titled: Emergency Plan to Save Oyster Production on the West Coast, I sent an email to every address listed in the document, volunteering my efforts to fix, build, lift, and haul...whatever I had to, to get some experience. Chris Langdon answered my call. I started my oyster education at the Molluscan Broodstock Program shortly after. At the MBP I had the good fortune to meet handfuls of supportive people and have their help working my way into a small farm on Netarts Bay—the lemonade stand of the oyster industry.

Though I have high hopes for Nevør Shellfish Farm, for now I'm just a wide eyed boy watching the big kids at play—anxious to join in. I've been full time on the farm just a few months. I have yet to earn the title, Grower, but I think, Joker with Some Tidelands, has its appeal.

The two years I spent at the MBP counting and weighing single set spat has somehow left me with an affinity for the little jewels. My goal for the farm then is to produce a half shell oyster that will find connoisseurs insatiate. The grounds I'm working (8 acres currently, an additional 40 pending county approval) are firm and well suited for bottom culture. I've also been experimenting with a long line culture technique that produces a savory petite oyster, as well as experimenting with a system to keep the grounds supplied with single seed. The first crop of ~400,000 petites is now a year and a half old and ready to harvest.

It is an exciting and terrifying experience, starting this farm, feeling so accomplished one day—sore and tired. The next day wondering what I'm doing and how I can possibly make it work with what little I have available. All the juggling led me to adopt a new decision making tool. Remember the acronym from several years ago: WWJD (What Would Jesus Do)? My newly adopted version: WWNJD (What Would Nick Jambor Do)? Though I guess I really don't know *what* Nick Jambor would do, having the reminder keeps me with a sense that someone is watching, in hopes I can keep from making business defeating decisions before I really even get started. Really, I can't help but feel I do have an experienced

big brother watching me in members of the industry and PCSGA. With that and this intense desire to make the farm work it can only be a couple short years until my lemonade stand makes it onto the map.

...There are evenings I wonder how the oyster farmers in Vegas did this growing season—yep. Working for a paycheck, buying chips to get into the game (or buying seed), chips on the table (or some tidelands), they hope their cards fall and their efforts are rewarded...What *is* the difference between oyster farming and a solid back breaking gamble? But what better way to spend one's days?

-Travis

travis@nevorshellfish.com