



WASHINGTON'S SHELLFISH GROWERS

Who We Are, What We Do

Shellfish farming has a long and proud tradition in Washington. Shellfish has been grown commercially here for more than 150 years - before statehood - and many farmers are the fourth and fifth generation in their families to grow shellfish.

Growing shellfish is a tough way to make a living. Years of hard work can be devastated in hours by a severe storm and beaches that have been farmed for 100 years can be closed because of water quality problems caused by encroaching development.

Even the largest shellfish companies in Washington are small by federal standards, and like virtually all other shellfish farms is family-owned and operated. The vast majority of shellfish farms are “mom and pop” operations on just a few acres of tideland (some as small as 100’ of beach). Oysters are the largest shellfish crop in Washington, followed by clams, mussels, and geoduck.

Regardless of the type of shellfish, planting and harvesting techniques are similar:

Seeding: Most baby shellfish (seed) are planted at the intertidal level, which means the area is alternately exposed and submerged by the tides. Methods include broadcast directly onto the beach, in or under protective netting, racks or tubes, or strung onto mother shell on lines suspended two or three feet off the beach (longlines). Mussels and some oyster culture takes place at the subtidal (always submerged) level off rafts or other floating structures.

Cultivation: The baby shellfish reach maturity between 1 to 6 years, depending on species and growing area. For geoduck, protective tubes are removed after one or two years, where they continue to grow, burrowing deeper in the sand for another three to five years.

Harvest: Depending on the species, shellfish is harvested by hand or mechanical means.

Because shellfish require clean water, growers are among the strongest advocates for clean water and often work with their local communities on water quality issues. Twice a year, members of the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association hold “beach parties” in which they clean up beaches in Southern Puget Sound. In a recent cleanup, 80 growers picked up enough trash to fill two 20-yard dumpsters, a 10-yard dump truck, and a flatbed truck. It’s important to note that 80% to 85% of the trash was not related to shellfish farming, but was instead generated by the general public.

The growers’ environmental commitment goes far beyond beach cleanups, however.

- Bill Taylor, Taylor Shellfish, served on Governor Gregoire’s Puget Sound Partnership, which was tasked with designing a strategy to protect and restore Puget Sound, and in 2005 the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration presented Taylor Shellfish with the Walter B. Jones award for “...their significant contributions to improve the coastal or ocean environment and their demonstrated ability to balance business interests with environmental need.”

- “Organic Style” magazine featured Laurra Lyden-McGregor, Lyden Shellfish, as “one of eight extraordinary women who are...making our country a safer, healthier, and more beautiful place.”

- In 2006, the National Shellfisheries Association presented its David H. Wallace award to Bill Dewey, Chuckanut Shellfish, and president and founder of the Pacific Shellfish Institute, for his longstanding efforts to promote research, understanding, and cooperation among shellfish scientists, culturists, managers, producers and regulators.