



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES

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Production of oysters, one of the most valuable products of United States waters, was generally lighter during the 1944-45 season than in the previous year due principally to labor shortages in the industry, according to Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, Deputy Coordinator of Fisheries, United States Department of the Interior.

Shortages of oyster fishermen, shuckers, and other packing house labor in some areas made it necessary to curtail production in accordance with the number of shuckers available, Dr. Gabrielson said. Many oyster companies in the New England area operated only half their boats.

Below-average production in New England and the Long Island Sound area is attributed by officials of the Office of the Coordinator of Fisheries to several causes in addition to lack of sufficient labor. The effect of the 1938 hurricane was still being felt, it was pointed out, because the storm destroyed the oyster set, some of which would normally have been ready for market during the past season. Also, fewer oysters were available for marketing in the 1944-45 season because many oyster companies sold their entire available stock, including 3-year old oysters, the previous year to take advantage of high market prices.

Production of oysters in the Maryland waters of Chesapeake Bay was reported to have been slightly larger than last year, good supplies of marketable oysters being available.

Gulf coast oysters, normally comprising about a fourth of the total U. S. production, declined about 28 per cent in yield over the previous season. Unlike northern oysters, the bulk of which are sold fresh, a large percentage of the oysters produced in southern states are canned. The world center for the canning of oysters is Biloxi, Mississippi.

Supplies of marketable oysters next season should be better than average in the New England area, Dr. Gabrielson said. The oysters that will be ready for sale next fall are the product of the 1940 and 1941 spawning seasons, when a heavy set of young oysters occurred.

The present labor situation in New England, where oysters are cultivated on privately leased aquatic farms, will result in a scarcity of market oysters four years from now, according to Dr. Gabrielson. During the spring months the oyster growers normally prepare their grounds for the oyster set that will occur in July and August. Since not enough labor is available to take care of all the grounds, some of them will necessarily remain unattended.

Dr. Victor L. Loosanoff, Fish and Wildlife Service biologist at Milford, Connecticut, reported that lack of labor is also hampering efforts to control

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starfish, which are the chief oyster enemies in New England and New York waters. Although the new crops of young starfish have been comparatively small during recent years, enough remain on the beds to endanger young oysters. Dr. Loosanoff said that unless control measures against starfish are continued on their usual scale, the quantity of marketable oysters available three or four years from now may be greatly reduced.

In Maryland waters, on the other hand, Service biologists report that stocks of oysters are increasing as a result of the State's program of controlled cultivation and harvesting. Barring unforeseen changes in natural conditions that affect growth and survival of the oysters, production is expected to increase during the next few years.

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