

Coastal Clips

A quarterly
publication of the
Louisiana Sea Grant
College Program at
Louisiana State University,
Baton Rouge



Finding New Opportunities for Innovation

More than 300 commercial fishermen, dock owners, processors and others had the opportunity to learn about issues facing their industry at the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit, held March 1 at the Pontchartrain Center. The last Summit was held in March 2020 just before public events were curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Summit is the state's premier commercial fishing and seafood industry event. Panel presentations ran throughout the day, in conjunction with a trade show that featured hands-on demonstrations about safety, innovative handling and processing equipment, gear and techniques.

"This is a Summit that's designed for anyone in the seafood industry — from oysters to freshwater fisheries," said Thomas Hymel marine Extension agent with Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter. "We had everything for the industry represented here, from machinery to get their equipment tuned up and ready to go, to GPS and the basics of micro-processing and packaging."

A 'Beyond the Boat' area focused on ways to add value to raw seafood and enhance the marketability of harvesters. That included live chef demonstrations cooking a variety of Louisiana seafood, and an overview of the new Seafood Processing Demonstration Lab (SPDL) now open in Jeanerette.

"The market is changing and consumers are changing, and they are willing to pay more for high quality seafood, while they look for suppliers they can trust," said Evelyn Watts, LSU AgCenter/Sea Grant seafood specialist and Louisiana Fisheries Forward program director. "Fishermen want to become more educated and implement changes to meet the needs of buyers and consumers if they are to move to the next economic level."

Produced by Louisiana Sea Grant, the LSU AgCenter and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries – with other industry partners – the Summit is part of the Louisiana Fisheries Forward education initiative.

Sea Grant Helps Catfish Processor with \$7 Million Grant

What started out as catfish traps for extra cash in 1975 grew into a 100,000 square foot facility in the heart of Henderson. And the business is about to grow again with a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant.

Guidry's Catfish and Processing Inc – the largest catfish processing facility in the state – buys from about 40 industry farmers, turning out more than 70 products for the foodservice industry and retail customers. With the help of Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter, Guidry's received \$7 million in USDA grant funds from the Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program (MPPEP).

MPPEP provides grants to help eligible processors expand their capacity, encourage competition and promote sustainable growth in the U.S. meat processing sector. Funds can be used for: building or expanding processing facilities; updating equipment; keeping compliant with packaging/labeling and safety requirements; and supporting workforce recruitment, training and retention.

Guidry's first learned about the program from The Catfish Institute, a nonprofit organization that promotes US farm-raised catfish products. Co-owners Cherrie Guidry and Joshua Guidry then researched if the company could be eligible for the MPPEP grant, reaching-out to the local USDA office as well as contacts at Louisiana State University – which included Sea Grant and AgCenter marine extension agent Thu Bui.

The big question Bui had for Louisiana Sea Grant's Law & Policy Program (LSGLPP): Does catfish qualify as meat under USDA guidelines?

Ultimately, LSGLPP determined that "all fish of the order *Siluriformes*" are considered meat by the USDA, with LSG/AgCenter seafood specialist Evelyn Watts confirming that catfish are *Siluriformes*.

"Between Sea Grant Legal and my understanding of regulations and USDA structure, we were able to identify that catfish processors were



eligible to apply for this opportunity," Watts said. In addition, Watts provided a letter to support Guidry's application, citing the many ways that the company has collaborated with LSU over the years to identify opportunities for the seafood industry in Louisiana as well as nationwide.

And following a feasibility study conducted the Louisiana Small Business Development Center, plus multiple letters of support from the LSU AgCenter, Guidry's was awarded the \$7 million MPPEP grant.

The company intends to use the funding to expand their current building and construct a partially frying (par-frying) facility which should help them expand to a national level. They also plan to add two more production lines and purchase new robotics equipment that should increase productivity by 30 percent.

"We hope that this expansion will create new jobs," Cherrie Guidry said. "This money will allow us to continue to provide quality seafood products and create new revenue sources in the local community."

Seafood Trail Highlights Ecotourism Opportunities

Ecotourism is all about nature and community. During the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine, Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter brainstormed ideas to keep the local seafood economy afloat. It started with the "Stay for the Seafood" video campaign, highlighting the seafood and culture of three major areas in the state of Louisiana. From there, the Seafood Trail idea blossomed for Lake Charles.

The Seafood Trail boasts some great local seafood, sights and activities, such as:

- Creole Nature Trail All-American Road
- Charlestown Farmer's Market
- Fishing in the greater Lake Charles area
- Lake Prien
- Bord du Lac Marin
- Millennium Park
- Shelling along the seashore
- Sam Houston Jones State Park

Originally, the Seafood Trail was designed to encourage local Louisianians to explore their area during the pandemic since traveling across state lines was shut down. It created opportunities for residents to discover hidden gems in their area. As quarantine ended, the trail now can be followed by residents and tourists alike. It provides a connection between nature, the seafood industry and other businesses in Lake Charles.

Emily Maung-Douglass, former Public Engagement Specialist with Louisiana Sea Grant, created signage with QR codes to post at each location. The QR codes will take users to a website that tells people about the location and the site's connection to the Seafood Trail. "I am very excited to encourage people to visit and learn about seafood and nature in the local area."



Emily Maung-Douglass (left) and Tracie Ramey, manager of the Sam Houston Jones State Park.

Maung-Douglass is hopeful that the Seafood Trail will engage residents and out-of-state tourists alike to get out and learn about the important connections between tourist destinations and the nature surrounding them.

For more information on the Louisiana Seafood Trail and Louisiana Sea Grant's other work in ecotourism, visit: www.laseagrant.org/outreach/ecotourism/.

LaTer Direct Seafood Opens Facebook Marketplace

A new marketplace for members of the commercial seafood industry in the Lafourche-Terrebonne area wanting to sell their wares directly to consumers is now open on Facebook.

The Facebook group – www.facebook.com/LaTerDirectSeafood – was established by Louisiana Sea Grant/LSU AgCenter marine extension agent Haley Gambill as a means for local commercial fishermen, docks and processors to connect with customers in an online environment. Similar efforts were made years ago through a direct sales website, but the site never really took-off.

“I saw that some fishermen were attempting to sell their catch through Facebook,” Gambill said. “Since the direct sales website wasn’t being used by them, I thought that maybe a Facebook group would be one way to help them sell more of their product. Through this group, customers won’t have to search multiple Facebook pages to find seafood. They can find it all in this one spot.”

To date, the group boasts nearly 400 members.



Essentially, Gambill’s objective is to streamline the direct sales process for those wishing to sell their product. And since she’s only been on the job for less than a year, she also hopes the group will serve as a means to meet and engage members of the industry.

“My hope is that fostering these connections within the seafood industry will lead to stronger community connections as well,” she said.

There are some rules for those who want to join the group:

- Members cannot post prices. They should post product available, dates and locations of availability, as well as their contact information.
- All state and federal regulations must be met to promote the product. This includes any licenses/certificates, such as from the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, the Louisiana Department of Health, local vendor licenses and state/local sales tax permits.
- And the group prohibits off topic postings, including any political posts, as well as videos.

Gambill can be reached at mgambill@agcenter.lsu.edu.

Future Fishing, Seafood Industry Leaders Sought

A one-year program to develop new leaders in the state’s fishing and seafood industry is being spearheaded by Louisiana Sea Grant. The application process for the Fisheries & Seafood Leadership Program (FSLP) opened in late March.

“This program is perfect for emerging leaders in the seafood industry,” said Julie Falgout, Louisiana Sea Grant seafood industry liaison. “Boat owners and captains, deckhands, docks and processors, individuals in the insurance and finance industries, fisheries managers – anyone interested in helping our state’s seafood industry navigate the coming decades – should apply.”

FSLP’s first class will begin in the fall and graduate in Summer 2024. Participants will learn about:

- Leadership skill building
- Effective communication
- Emerging technologies
- Business and marketing trends
- Commodity policy issues
- National, state and community-level public policies
- Economic development

FSLP tuition is \$200, but scholarships may be available. Members of the first cohort will be announced in May.

“This program has been in the planning stages since before the pandemic,” said Falgout. “We’re excited about providing this opportunity to help our fishing industry become more resilient and advocate for their needs.”

For more information, contact Falgout at jfalgout@agcenter.lsu.edu, (985) 856-2477 or visit www.laseagrant.org/outreach/fslp/.

Program sponsors also are being sought.



Shrimp boats at Dulac

Petrolia Named Sea Grant Laborde Chair

Dan Petrolia, professor of agricultural economics at Mississippi State University, has been named Laborde Endowed Chair for Sea Grant Research and Technology Transfer at Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG). His appointment is from mid-January through the end of June.

During this time, Petrolia will work on a project titled *Identifying Economic Opportunities and Challenges for Commercial Oyster Production in Louisiana* to help develop targeted economic analysis and outreach for alternative oyster culture (AOC) operations, as well as develop baseline, comparative budgets for traditional oyster production. AOC is when oysters are grown in floating cages or in bottom-placed cages attached to pylons. This method allows the cages to be raised and lowered to protect oysters from predators, fouling and the burial effects of disasters like hurricanes.

A native of Louisiana, Petrolia has emerged as one of the nation’s most prolific natural resource economists. His work has covered a broad spectrum



of innovative applications related to the economics of agricultural and environmental markets, non-market valuation, policy, risk and cost-benefit analysis. A review of his research portfolio shows nearly 40 scholarly publications associated with the economics of oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) in the northern Gulf of Mexico. His initial research on this topic examined the potential of niche marketing strategies for enhancing the profile and profitability of locally branded oysters from specific coastal regions.

The John P. Laborde Endowed Chair for Sea Grant Research and Technology Transfer enables Louisiana Sea Grant to bring highly qualified scientists to LSU to focus on marine and coastal issues critical to the state while providing those researchers with supplemental funding. To date, ten internationally recognized researchers have been appointed to the endowed chair. The chair was established in 1994 with a gift of \$600,000 from Tidewater Inc. – where John P. Laborde served as CEO for nearly 40 years – and a match of \$400,000 from the Louisiana Board of Regents.

Robinson Takes on Hatchery Manager Duties

Elizabeth Robinson has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as the Michael C. Voisin Oyster Hatchery operations manager and interim director in Grand Isle.

As the operations manager, Robinson will administer hatchery activities; monitor personnel, facility equipment, system repairs and routine maintenance; develop research projects; and support outreach and extension activities for the LSG Oyster Research Laboratory.

Robinson earned her bachelor's degree from Centenary College of Louisiana, master's degree from Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, and Ph.D. in oceanography and coastal sciences from Louisiana State University.

Her doctoral research examined the impact of the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill on mollusk and crustacean populations, behavior and predator-prey interactions. After completion of her Ph.D., she completed a science policy fellowship with the National Academies of Science Gulf Research Program before returning to LSU as a postdoctoral researcher. Her postdoctoral research examined the transmission of a virus (CsRV1) in soft shell blue crab aquaculture systems. She also created several extension tools to help people interested in conducting soft shell crab aquaculture.



Lenore Joins Sea Grant as Business Manager

Conner Lenore has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as the program's new business manager.

Lenore earned her bachelor's degree in management and human resources from Southeastern Louisiana University. She recently earned her Master of Business Administration from Louisiana State University.

She has been an LSU employee since 2016. Before working at LSG, she worked in LSU's Continuing Education's call center and then moved her way up to the human resource coordinator. In 2021, she was promoted to the operations manager.

"I am looking to bring organization and innovation to Sea Grant. I look forward to collaborating with the team and learning new things," said Lenore.



Gould Joins Accounting Team

Tyronne Gould has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as the program's newest accountant.

Gould earned his Master's in Business Administration in 2011 from Strayer University in Atlanta, Ga. An original New Orleans native, Gould relocated to Atlanta in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina. He returned to Louisiana after working as an accounts payable specialist with Republic Finance.

"I was interested in the position because of the accounting aspect as well as Sea Grant's association with LSU. It means I am a part of something elite and special," Gould said.



Braud Becomes Sea Grant Scholar

DeWitt Braud, recently retired from Louisiana State University, will be returning to Louisiana Sea Grant as the newest Sea Grant Scholar.

He began working for LSU in 1978 in the Division of Engineering Research Remote Sensing and Image Processing Lab, which included two years at the NASA Earth Resources Lab in Slidell. He accepted a teaching position in 1992 with the Department of Geography and Anthropology and transferred to the Coastal Studies Institute in 2004. In recent years he has been collaborating with Louisiana Sea Grant on geospatial projects.

His background in remote sensing (RS) and geospatial sciences will allow him to advise Sea Grant's Marine Extension Program (MEP) in exploring mapping needs and provide support for projects that require geographic information systems (GIS), such as continuing his work with Harbors of Refuge, a project that aims to organize a plan for vessels to moor during a storm.

Sea Grant Executive Director, Julie Lively is "excited DeWitt is coming back to lend his GIS expertise and knowledge to coastal issues in Louisiana. He will be an asset to our program as a scholar."

"I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the people of Sea Grant in the past," said Braud. "Their shared mission creates a sense of purpose and a collegial atmosphere. I look forward to continuing this relationship and assisting MEP agents in employing geospatial sciences in their work," he said.



Gambill Hired as Marine Extension Agent

Haley Gambill has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as a Marine Extension agent for Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. She began her new role last August.

Gambill began her association with LSG in 2020 as a Sea Grant-supported graduate student studying white spot syndrome in cultured crawfish. She also participated in LSG's Graduate Research Scholars program, which helped provide her with a familiarity of other coastal research projects and challenges.

As a Marine Extension agent, Gambill looks forward to continuing collaborations she established during her time as a graduate student at Louisiana State University (LSU) and creating new partnerships within Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes. During her time at LSU, Gambill grew an appreciation for the uniqueness of Louisiana and the importance of the seafood industry.

"I am excited to learn the ins and outs of how these industries operate, listen to stakeholder concerns and ideas and foster relationships that promote scientific collaboration and focus on Louisiana's important fisheries and coastal issues," said Gambill.

Gambill earned her bachelor's degree in fisheries, wildlife and conservation biology from North Carolina State University in Raleigh. She continued her education at LSU where she earned a master's degree in oceanography and coastal sciences from the College of the Coast and Environment.



Hayes Joins Louisiana Sea Grant as Water Quality Specialist

Michael Hayes has joined Louisiana Sea Grant as the program's water quality specialist and been appointed an assistant professor in the School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences (SPESS) at Louisiana State University (LSU).

Hayes' Ph.D. research focused on wetland and river nutrient cycling. He spent the past three years of his professional career working to develop detection and extraction techniques for current and emerging contaminants in the agriculture industry, developing water use reduction techniques, as well as waste minimization protocols. He comes to Sea Grant from LSU's Industrial Assessment Center, where he served as assistant director of research.

"I believe that extension into our coastal and agricultural communities is an integral part of developing a feasible, sustainable future," he said. "I am excited to build a water quality program that focuses on the immediate needs of our Louisiana communities."

Hayes earned his Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry from Spring Hill College in Mobile, Ala. He continued his graduate studies at LSU, where he earned his doctorate, also in chemistry.

He can be reached at mhayes@agcenter.lsu.edu.



New Communications Coordinator Begins

Hannah Bellone has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as the program's new communications coordinator.

Bellone received her Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology with a minor in creative writing from Louisiana State University. During her undergraduate years at LSU, she was employed as a student worker in Louisiana Sea Grant Communications. She comes to Sea Grant from the Louisiana State Police Crime Lab, where she was an evidence technician and certified crime scene photographer and videographer.

"I am extremely excited to be returning to Sea Grant. I am looking forward to all the outreach and special projects that Sea Grant puts together. I am hopeful that my creative talents will be a great contribution to the program," said Bellone.



Young Joins Louisiana Sea Grant

Jessica Young has joined Louisiana Sea Grant (LSG) as assistant to the executive director.

Young received both an English bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwest Missouri State University. She previously worked as a high school English teacher in her home state of Missouri before moving to Louisiana. Upon her arrival in Louisiana, she worked as a student success coach at LSU Online.

"Since interviewing, everyone at Louisiana Sea Grant has been so kind. LSU has been such a welcoming place to land since relocating to Louisiana, and I am excited to continue that journey with Louisiana Sea Grant," said Young.



Second Round Alternative Oyster Culture Grant Recipients Announced

The second round of Alternative Oyster Culture (AOC) grants, totaling \$465,000, have been announced.

Thirteen grants were awarded to:

- Ryan Anderson, for a grow-out farm
- Albert Besson, dba Barataria Beauties Oyster Company, for a grow-out farm
- Michael "Laine" Fontenot, Gulf of Mexico Tuna Company, for a grow-out farm
- Khai Dang, for a grow-out farm
- Chad Guidry, dba Big Jim's Seafood, for a grow-out farm
- Jason Pitre, dba Bayou Rosa Oyster Farm, for a grow-out farm
- George "Nick" Waguespack, for a grow-out farm
- Percy Dardar, dba World's Finest Oysters, for a nursery farm and grow-out farm
- Tony Tesvich, dba TJT, LLC, for a nursery farm and grow-out farm
- Nathan Herring, dba Bright Side Oyster Farm, for a nursery farm
- Steve Pollock, dba Triple N Oyster Farm, for a nursery farm

Funding for the grant program, which is administered by Louisiana Sea Grant and awarded by the Iberia Development Foundation (IDF), comes from the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) and the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA).

This second round of competitive funding was open to all Louisiana licensed oyster fishers. Individuals had to apply for each type of grant, and each was independently assessed in the award process with no guarantee that success in one category meant success in another. Award amounts were \$15,000 per nursery farm and \$45,000 per grow-out farm.

"Awardees from this round of funding include AOC farmers both experienced and new to cage culture and nursery farms," said Wood Oglesby, AOC Program outreach coordinator. "It's exciting to see the impact of these grants, as we watch our first set of growers start to harvest and sell cultured oysters and provide seed from their nurseries. We expect more industry growth as these second-round recipients come online — meeting our goal to enhance and expand AOC operations across the state."

Grant recipients were chosen by an independent selection committee made up of impartial industry experts, who evaluated each on a competitive scale based on five key elements and their interview. The committee reviewed the applicants' personal qualifications and experience, the AOC site location as it influences the biological and physiological needs of the oyster and the ability to work and harvest without influences of public health concerns. Additionally, the committee was able to evaluate an applicant's personal thoughts on what AOC means to them and how prepared they are to start a business, and any outside financial efforts they may be pursuing to bolster their business through grants.

Over a three-year period, \$1.8 million in grants will be available to AOC operators to acquire equipment and supplies to enhance existing businesses or establish new AOC businesses. That includes AOC seed nurseries and grow-out facilities, hatcheries and areas legally designated as AOC Management Units (parks) that contain multiple farms in one location. Grant recipients are reimbursed for their purchases, up to the total amount of his or her grant.

AOC is when oysters are grown in floating cages or in bottom-placed cages attached to pylons. This method allows the cages to be raised and lowered to protect oysters from predators, fouling and the burial effects of disasters like hurricanes.

"Louisiana's oyster industry has a long and distinguished history, all built on the exceptional growing conditions found in our coastal marshes," said Rusty Gaudé, marine extension agent with Louisiana Sea Grant and the LSU AgCenter. "These conditions allow for the AOC participants to optimize oyster growth by placing the fate of the shellfish in locations which not only produce a near-perfect product, but do it faster than almost anywhere else in the nation."

Visit www.laseafoodfuture.com/aoc to stay informed about further grant opportunities.



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Louisiana State University
Sea Grant Building
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Julie Anderson Lively,
Executive Director

Editors: Roy Kron, Hannah Bellone, Peyton Conlin
Art: Robert Ray

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Louisiana Master Naturalist Program Marks 10 Years

Initially established in 2012 in the New Orleans area, the past 10 years of the Louisiana Master Naturalist Association (LMNA) has seen it grown from one to seven chapters and more than 700 active members across the state.

“Thousands of Louisianians have enhanced their environmental literacy, and their role as ‘citizen scientists’, through the cumulative efforts of chapters of the state LMNA program,” said Rusty Gaudé, the Louisiana Sea Grant and LSU AgCenter extension agent who spearheaded the creation of the program. “As a Sea Grant and AgCenter agent, I’m proud to have had a hand in that outcome.”

Each chapter hosts classes and field days, getting chapter members and community partners out in nature to promote conservation, learn about local flora and fauna, as well as other environmental and ecological characteristics. Chapters are the Greater New Orleans Chapter (New Orleans), the Northwest Chapter (Shreveport/Bossier), the Northeast Chapter (Monroe), the CenLA Chapter (Alexandria), the Greater Baton Rouge Chapter (East Baton Rouge and the surrounding parishes), the Southwest Chapter (Lake Charles) and the Acadiana Chapter (Lafayette).

In the last decade, the Louisiana Master Naturalists of Greater New Orleans (LMNGNO) has obtained a physical headquarters and can now house and lend equipment to chapter members for events and research. Additionally, the New Orleans chapter hopes to develop specialist programs to further enhance competence of their members, as well as create grant application opportunities.

LMNGNO has also created a program to engage certified naturalists who have already completed the workshops but want to continue learning. The Continuing Education and Engagement Program will include study groups, seminars and outings and act as a qualifying event for the Master Naturalist continuing education requirement.

Master Naturalists chapter members focus on learning all about the geological, biological, botanical and entomological aspects of their locale. And through public outreach, Master Naturalists engage the community in the environment that surrounds them.

Master Naturalist certification classes are open to the public who are 18 years or older. Expert Master Naturalists lead prospective members through eight to ten workshops. Each workshop is six hours long and consists of classroom training and field work.

If interested in becoming a Master Naturalist, the best place to start is by attending a general membership meeting.

Chapter and other information can be found at www.louisianamasternaturalist.org.