North and South Carolina

Oyster Aquaculture

Summer Mortality Events

Summer mortality events are becoming more widespread on oyster farms in the Southeast.

What is a Mortality Event?

- It is normal to lose 5-10% of stock during the grow-out process.
- A mortality event is when a large number of oysters die or show signs of weakening in a short period of time without an easily visible cause.

What You Need to Know

- Summer mortality events most frequently impact larger oysters, both diploid and triploid, that are at or near market size, and that were hatchery produced.
- Summer mortality events in North and South Carolina tend to occur in high salinity environments (≥35ppt) from May-September.

Growers: Take Steps to Prevent Summer Mortality Events

- Plant larger seed in the fall for harvest prior to peak summer - plan to harvest by mid-May.
- OR keep smaller oysters on farms during higher risk summer months and then harvest in the fall and winter.
- Move larger oysters to lower risk habitats (lower salinity) during the summer months.
What to Do if You Experience a Summer Mortality Event on Your Farm

The N.C. State University Shellfish Pathology Laboratory routinely investigates recurring oyster mortality events in the southeastern U.S. at no cost to the industry. While there are no remedies once a mortality event has occurred, it is important to document that one has happened. Notifying Sea Grant or directly contacting the pathology lab is the first step.

Who to Contact

North Carolina Growers
Eric Herbst, N.C. Sea Grant
echerbst@ncsu.edu
(704) 898-2596

South Carolina Growers
Sarah Pedigo, S.C. Sea Grant Consortium
Sarah.Pedigo@scseagrant.org
(843) 953-2074

Relevant Information to Share with Sea Grant

- Grower’s name and contact information
- Location of farm
- The source of the seed (state, hatchery, seed line)
- The size of oysters that were impacted (height in mm – from hinge to bill)
- Date the mortality was noticed
- Total number and percent mortality that occurred
- Available environmental data (temperature, salinity, etc.)

Sampling Oysters

Live oyster samples (not gaping or open) are helpful to identify whether individual mortality events are caused by similar processes. These should be sampled as the event is unfolding, and five or fewer are needed.

To send oyster samples contact:
Dr. Tal Ben-Horin, N.C. State University Shellfish Pathology Laboratory –
tbenhor@ncsu.edu
(252) 222-6312

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www.scseagrant.org/living-marine-resources