

YELLOW FARMHOUSE

EDUCATION CENTER

Ocean Farming Part I: Shellfish

March 23, 2023, 3:00-4:30 PM

[link to video](#)

In this workshop, we meet two women who work in the Connecticut aquaculture industry – researcher and educator Tessa Getchis, and also oyster farmer Beth Gomes.

Tessa Getchis is a faculty member at the University of Connecticut Department of Extension and an Aquaculture Specialist and Senior Educator with Connecticut Sea Grant. In her presentation, Tessa talks about the role that shellfish farming has played in the world and Connecticut history and describes the current state of aquaculture in Connecticut. We learn that some shellfish, including oysters, create reefs that provide habitat for their seed and spat; that shellfish filter and clean the waters where they live; and that damage or loss of shellfish habitat leads to environmental, economic, and cultural harm. Finally, Tessa tells about the seed beds maintained by Connecticut Department of Agriculture for the benefit of licensed oyster farmers, who use them as a source for their oyster beds.

In a video, produced by Iowa PBS, Tessa Getchis and an Oyster farmer intalk about working on the State of CT Dept of Agriculture Shellfish Restoration Project. We learn that the increase in frequent storms that churn the sand on the bottom of Long Island Sound, and the silt that travels down CT rivers into the Sound have damaged oyster reefs. Tessa and describe the successful collaboration, that began in 2020, between ocean farmers, Sea Grant, and the State of CT to clean the silt and restore the beds. [Oyster Farmers Clean up in CT](#)

Next, Farmhouse Educator Eric Dawson speaks with Beth Gomes, an ocean farmer from a long line of ocean farmers and one of the proprietors of [Stonington Farms Shellfish](#). Beth describes her unique approach to farming oysters – over the course of the 2 years it takes their crop of 75,000 oysters to mature to harvest, they are each handled approximately 40 times. Handling includes washing, tumbling, sieving, chipping, shaking, sorting, and moving oysters from bags to cages to the bottom all with the goal of maximizing the oysters’ growth, shell strength and shape, size, flavor, and aesthetic appeal. Beth talks about the effect of the water’s salinity and mineral content on shell strength and flavor, how they deal with predators like blue crabs and oyster drills, and the health of the Mystic River where eelgrass is recovering its place in the ecosystem. She compares ocean and

land farming in terms of their need for a balanced growing substrate, talks about the fact that mud suffocates oysters, and how her business does lots of dredging to remove mud (and garbage). Beth describes the joy of life on the water, the pleasure of working hard with her family, and the satisfaction of seeing people enjoy their products. Finally, we go out on the water with Beth and her family and see ocean farming in action.

Resources

[Sea Grant: Aquaculture and Fisheries](#)

[CT Aquaculture Essential Knowledge flier](#)