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THE OYSTER INSTITUTE OF NORTH AMERICA
Organized 1935, by the Oyster Growers & Dealers Association of North America, Inc.

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THE STATE OF THE OYSTER FISHERY IN LONG ISLAND

SOUND AND THE CATASTROPHE OF THE STARFISH PLAGUE

Oyster set in Long Island Sound produced a crop in 1951 of 11,352,600 pounds of edible meat valued at \$7,270,893 at point of landing. These oysters were grown not only in Connecticut and New York but in Massachusetts and Rhode Island waters as well. The catch in 1957 had dropped to about 650,000 pounds valued at about \$1.5 millions. Although complete records are not available for 1958 the decline has continued.

We will be considering a terminated industry unless government is willing to assist us in this fight for survival. Even a coordinated effort may be too late to be effective. The few surviving oyster companies waged a relentless, and, in many ways, a losing battle in 1958. They spent over a half a million dollars fighting to keep their grounds clear of starfish. The odds were all against them since public or abandoned grounds predominate and as fast as the growers removed a batch, a new wave of the enemies moved onto their ground.

Dr. Victor Loosanoff stated that the set of starfish which produced the present horde was not unusually heavy but survival of the young stars was very great indeed. The resulting crop was 10 to 100 times the normal quantity usually found on the beds. After a year of growth, Dr. Loosanoff reports the stars are almost as abundant as last year with no let up in sight.

Scientists of the U. S. Bureau of Commercial Fisheries made some studies last summer of the starfish problem and the efficiency of the control measures being practiced by the growers. Their preliminary findings are frightening indeed to those in the industry who are left struggling to survive. The scientists found that the starfish are able to take free rides on the currents and may be moved considerable distances by the strong tides and currents. This may mean that the efforts thus far by the industry have been relatively unfruitful, since a new supply of starfish is being brought continually to their grounds from surrounding areas where no controls are being practiced.

We are proposing that a substantial part of any funds be allocated for technique development and research to evaluate the success of the control measures. For example, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent by growers in depositing lime on their grounds. Again the preliminary findings have not been too encouraging. If the program is to succeed, proper handling techniques must be developed.

An organization should be set up to coordinate the activities of all groups involved in the program. If Connecticut and New York appropriate \$25,000 each, there is every likelihood that we can expect substantial help from the Federal government. It is recommended that an overall Advisory Board be set up of State and Federal officials and Industry leaders from both states to form policies for the direction of the work. Furthermore, a Technical Advisory Committee composed of scientists from the

U. S. Fishery Laboratory, Milford, and others from the states of New York and Connecticut should be established to formulate the technique development and evaluation program and allocate the research projects among the various available research agencies to avoid duplication and to insure that all aspects are followed out.

It would seem to me that these two Committees could be formed almost immediately and much preliminary planning done even before any funds are available. I cannot emphasize too strongly that time is not on our side in this struggle. Every month's delay is hurrying us to the time when efforts will be useless. It is our hope that the leaders of New York and Connecticut assembled here can obtain immediate action in their states and lend assistance to us to persuade Congress to move quickly.

The oyster industry for the first time in its long history is asking for real help. They have always been independent and able to fight their battles alone. They can do so no longer! This important business can be restored where it returns again millions annually to the peoples of New York and Connecticut. It is our hope that we can have your aid.