

6th International Oyster Symposium (IOS6): Joining the Hands of Science, Industry and Culture

by

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The 6th Annual International Oyster Symposium (IOS6) was held on Cape Cod October 21-23, 2015 becoming the first time the United States has played host to this important worldwide conference. The Symposium brought together representatives from 6 continents and 20 USA states in the fields of academia, cuisine, government, business, conservation and culture to discuss and advance oyster aquaculture and regeneration. Symposium activities took place at the Marine Biological Lab in Woods Hole and at The Sea Crest Beach Hotel in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

Why so much international attention on oysters? As Nature's remarkable bio-engineer, and key linchpin between land and sea, oysters excel at purifying our waters and estuaries. Their natural reef structures can keep pace with sea level rise, and protect coastlines against erosion and storm surges. They are also a superior sustainable low cost food source with remarkable health benefits. Small in size, but large in stature, oysters are critical workhorses for our seas and coastlines worldwide. However, now when the oysters' bioengineering benefits are needed most, 85% of their historic reef systems are gone (Beck, et al), making wild oysters the most endangered habitat in the world. With such a pedigree and plight, the IOS6 was designed for attendees to discuss key issues pertaining to the future of oysters.

Throughout the three-day Symposium, many of the world's oyster aficionados participated in workshops, round-table discussions, a tour of Cape Cod Oyster Farms, a Trade Show and more. Keynote speakers opened each day; visionary Barton Seaver, Director of the Healthy and Sustainable Food Program at The Center for Health and The Global Environment at The Harvard School of Public Health; Bill Taylor of Taylor Shellfish Farms, CEO of the largest oyster enterprise in America with businesses in Asia; and Margaret Davidson, Senior thought leader for the USA's National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration, currently tasked with coastal resiliency planning. Local dignitaries participating included Massachusetts State Senator Dan Wolf and U.S. Congressman William Keating. Senator Wolf comments, "IOS6 provided an important opportunity for our local industry to make strong connections to the world market, and exchange cutting edge research and best practices to benefit the global industry and our environment."

The intention of the symposium was five fold: 1) present current biological research 2) share best practices and challenges to advancing industry and production of oysters for human food, 3) share case studies that utilize oysters in improving water quality, restoring biodiversity, and protecting our coastlines and harbors 4) provide innovative projects and methods to improve public knowledge of oysters and empower communities 5) provide interdisciplinary round table discussions to spotlight successes and face squarely the challenges oyster aquaculture and restoration efforts face. Dr. Stan Allen, Senior Scientist at the prestigious Virginia Institute of Marine Science adds, "The IOS6 program is outstanding and outstandingly original. Cape Cod has set the precedent for all IOS meetings in the future."

Oysters have long been a foundation of Cape Cod's economy, environment, cuisine and culture, making the 70 mile peninsula home to over 240 oyster farmers a fitting location for this gathering. The symposium happened during the midst of Cape Cod Oyster Week, a regional celebration of the bivalve, which began on October 17/18 with the 15th Annual Wellfleet OysterFest and culminated on October 22 with The Oyster Grand Tasting held

during the symposium. To help increase oyster literacy, the public had the opportunity to participate in some of the Symposium events, including the Trade Show, an evening of oyster edu-tainment with national celebrity, humorist Paula Poundstone, an oyster art gallery exhibit, in addition to the Oyster Grand Tasting dinner!

Trade Show, and Art and Education Expo

The Trade Show brought new technologies to support oyster aquaculture and restoration efforts. Mark Burnett from GoDeep International based in Canada comments,

*"We made the decision to exhibit at IOS6 in Cape Cod primarily to connect with new customers and strengthen existing relationships. What we received instead was a greater appreciation and understanding of what's currently relevant in the oyster industry and what our customers truly want...from the trade show to the industry talks, the networking opportunities to the Oyster Grand Tasting event, IOS6 was an outstanding conference. **We'll be back again in 2017.**"*

The exhibition hall also included the "Oysters for Our Seas" gallery show, a collection of paintings and sculptures featuring oysters. All art was for sale to benefit the N/S American Chapter and its ongoing oyster education efforts.

Oyster Grand Tasting

As a featured evening event at the Symposium, Executive and Master Chefs from the East, West and South coasts of USA, and Master Chefs from Japan participated at the oyster extravaganza. Approximately 400 attendees sampled both a cooked dish and the same oyster, naked, to savor each oysters' unique merroire. Music was performed by the Fred Clayton Jazz Quartet.

The interdisciplinary and conversational programming throughout the three days, inspired by the words of the World Oyster Society's President Dr. Katsuyoshi Mori, "Let the Sea Live, Let us Live With the Sea," drew approximately 350 people from around the globe. "It was an honor for the United States and Cape Cod to be the host for IOS6 and help raise the tide of the oyster renaissance. Our seas and the peoples around the world are well served by joining forces to advance oyster restoration and aquaculture," said Kahren Dowcett, Symposium Chair and World Oyster Society North/South American Chapter Director.

Recently Gérald Viaud, Président du Comité National de la Conchyliculture in France wrote, "The exchange of experiences between professionals is essential for finding solutions around issues, which confront us all...and brings us to support each other by the necessity of understanding the importance and role of shellfish farming for the preservation of ecosystems."

As a global oyster community, it is important we carry the intention of these words and the success of IOS6 forward to the 7th International Oyster Symposium to be held in Wales, UK in 2017. The IOS is held biennially for the benefit of humankind, the vision of the World Oyster Society.

Please visit oystersymposium.org and oystergrandtasting.com for further information.

Kahren Dowcett, MS is the North and South American Chapter Director, World Oyster Society and the Program Architect and Chair for the IOS6. Impassioned by the sea, Ms. Dowcett resides on Cape Cod where she creates initiatives to increase oyster literacy for both individual and collective betterment.