

Zesty New Oyster Research Cresting

There may not be any pearls to be found in the Pacific oyster, but this eco-friendly mariculture bivalve shellfish species is still a very palatable delicacy both locally and abroad. The Western Cape alone consumes 61 % of the oysters produced by the eight local oyster farmers and the cultivation of the Pacific oyster, *Crassostrea gigas*, is an R8.5 million industry in South Africa, according to the AISA 2009 Aquaculture Benchmarking Survey. There is also a demand for South African farmed oysters in the Far East, which is promising for local oyster farmers who are optimistic about the expansion of the industry for the increased export of high value live oysters.

In order to support such development, the establishment of a local oyster hatchery would be of benefit to oyster farmers, who currently import oyster spat. A research project to facilitate this is underway with the aim to select the most appropriate brood stock for the South African environment. The project team includes local oyster farmers; the University of Stellenbosch; Marine and Coastal Management; and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture. The experiment involves comparing different oyster strains at three farming sites distributed in the Northern, Eastern and Western Cape. Aspects under investigation include growth rates, oyster condition, environmental data, degree of fouling, as well as a molecular genetics study. The study is advised by the needs of oyster farmers; the results of this study will assist in the establishment of a local oyster hatchery.

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