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MSU PEARL Partners with the Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) to Grow Maryland’s Oyster Aquaculture Industry

DBED Grant Supports Oyster Hatchery at Morgan State University

Morgan State University has received a grant from the Department of Economic Development to increase economic development and job creation of a sustainable oyster aquaculture industry.

The oyster aquaculture industry in Maryland is new, vital, ambitious, and innovative, but it is also hamstrung by a shortage of oyster larvae/spat necessary to support its growth as a vital industry. Maryland oyster farmers are increasingly at a disadvantage to Virginia farmers, as “native” demand for Virginia hatchery production continues to swell with the booming Virginia aquaculture industry. This $150,000 DBED grant to Morgan State University’s Patuxent Aquatic and Environmental Research Laboratory would initiate the restarting of production at MSU PEARL’s hatchery to support the industry in the short term and to potentially create commercial hatcheries in the long term.

Oyster hatcheries play a central role in creating a reliable supply of oyster larvae and/or oyster spat for use by industry. Nearly 50 years ago, it was the development of hatchery technologies on the U.S. Pacific Coast that opened the door to the sustainable farming of oysters, rather than the traditional reliance on the vagaries of nature to furnish wild spat for farmers. The advent of hatcheries also paved the way for selective breeding and development of particular genetic lineages of oysters that feature superior characteristics for farming applications.

In Virginia, there are currently six large-scale commercial hatcheries as well as two research hatcheries. In comparison, Maryland has no commercial hatcheries and one state-run production hatchery at Horn Point. Only a limited amount of the Horn Point production is allocated for sale to oyster farmers -the rest is planted within an extensive system of oyster sanctuaries and other sponsored projects. In this climate, Maryland aquaculture farmers are becoming increasingly desperate for sources of oyster larvae/spat needed to grow their businesses.

This grant allows MSU PEARL to operate the hatchery, producing larvae and spat for Maryland oyster farmers. The hatchery will also work on the creation of commercial hatcheries.

Morgan State University is one of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). Morgan State is a coeducational institution, located in a residential section of northeast Baltimore,
Maryland. The campus covers an area of more than 143 acres. The University offers a comprehensive range of academic programs through the doctorate.

MSU PEARL is located near the Patuxent River (part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed) in Saint Leonard, Maryland. The mission of the PEARL is to provide society with the knowledge to solve its environmental challenges through research, education and economic development. MSU PEARL applies interdisciplinary approaches to studying the connections between complex ecological systems.

Founded in 1967 by The Academy of Natural Sciences and located in Benedict, Maryland, the laboratory moved to current facility in St. Leonard, Maryland, in 1994, and became part of Morgan State University in September 2004.

As the state's primary economic development agency, the Department of Business and Economic Development (DBED) stimulates private investment and creates jobs by attracting new businesses, encouraging the expansion and retention of existing companies, and providing workforce training and financial assistance to Maryland companies. The Department also promotes the state's many economic advantages and markets local products and services at home and abroad to spur economic development and international investment, trade and tourism.

Since 2010, DBED has assisted nearly 4,000 small businesses and organizations; helped create or retain 40,000 jobs, and leveraged nearly $3 billion in private investment. Companies such as Amazon, Discovery Communications, Johns Hopkins Medical, Legg Mason, Millennial Media, Under Armour and Volvo Powertrain have recently located or expanded in Maryland.