

# Understanding Public Preferences for Molluscan Shellfish Aquaculture in Connecticut

## Report on a 2022 Survey of Connecticut Residents

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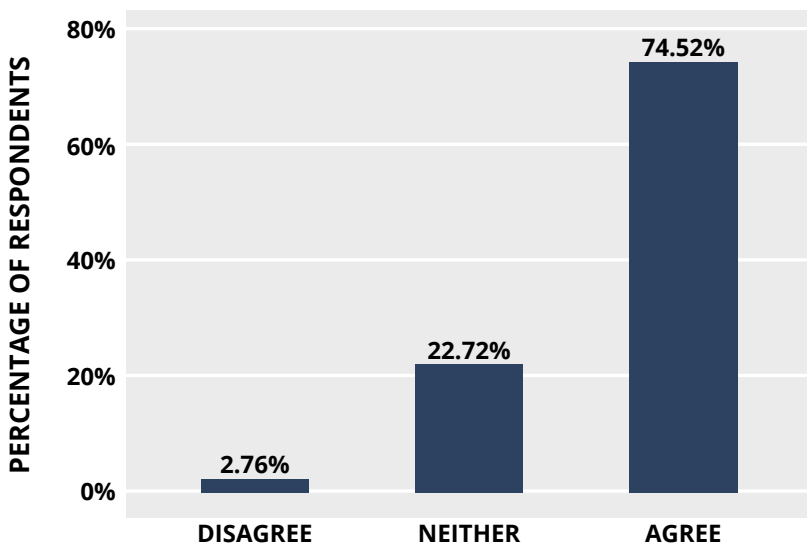
### THE PURPOSE

As the aquaculture industry grows throughout New England, stakeholders are curious to understand how the industry will affect the environment, the economy, and communities. State and local governments are interested in developing holistic strategies to manage and support the growth of the aquaculture industry based on community feedback.

The bivalve or molluscan aquaculture industry is associated with a range of economic and

environmental benefits. In 2019 the total value of aquaculture landings in Connecticut was \$22.6 million<sup>1</sup>. The most recent US Census of Agriculture (2017) ranks aquaculture as 5th in value of all agricultural products. Molluscan aquaculture can also support ecosystem services such as enhanced water filtration and nutrient removal. Yet new or expanded aquaculture operations may be opposed by individuals concerned with potential effects on coastal aesthetics, public access, competing uses, or other impacts.

**Figure 1. Level of agreement with the statement "In general, I support activities that promote more shellfish aquaculture in Connecticut"**



Research is being conducted across New England to understand public perceptions of aquaculture. This research can help to identify ways in which aquaculture can grow in the context of other uses and in ways that maximize public support, as an input to coastal zone management strategies.

This study focused on two goals. The first goal was to understand Connecticut residents' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences related to bivalve shellfish aquaculture in the state. The second goal was to evaluate public preferences for possible changes to bivalve shellfish aquaculture statewide.

To meet these goals, researchers from Clark University developed a survey that included a wide range of attitudinal and demographic questions, along with referendum-style voting questions on different future aquaculture scenarios. These voting questions asked respondents to vote for or against different types of hypothetical but realistic bivalve shellfish aquaculture scenarios for Connecticut.



### **DID YOU KNOW?**

Shellfish Farming is a \$23 Million Industry in Connecticut

**SOURCE: CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

<sup>1</sup> Data reported by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture (DOAG) at: <https://portal.ct.gov/DOAG/Aquaculture1/Aquaculture/Shellfish-Industry-Profile>

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The survey was developed and pretested over a two-year period with input from aquaculture experts, policy makers, stakeholders, and focus groups held with Connecticut residents. It was implemented during early 2022, yielding a sample of 1,087 responses from randomly selected Connecticut households.

## Key Findings

Results of this study include five major findings:

- On average, Connecticut residents support scenarios that expand bivalve shellfish aquaculture production statewide.
- While most residents favor scenarios with greater statewide aquaculture, there are some residents who do not support new aquaculture development.
- Although residents expressed support for bivalve aquaculture growth statewide, preferences for this growth depend on where new growing areas would be located.
  - On average, residents displayed the most positive preferences for aquaculture located in New Haven County, compared to aquaculture in other locations such as Fairfield County.
  - Residents' preferences for location also depend on the type of aquaculture—for example whether it uses floating or bottom gear.

- Connecticut households' votes show greater support for shellfish aquaculture that provides greater ecosystem services (such as water filtration), jobs, and revenues to the state.
- On average, Connecticut residents are not opposed to shellfish aquaculture gear that is visible on the water's surface and might prevent public accessibility (i.e., floating gear).
  - However, residents indicated stronger positive preferences for aquaculture that uses less-visible bottom gear.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

This study shows that the majority of Connecticut households support bivalve aquaculture growth statewide, but that the extent of positive support depends on how and where new aquaculture is developed. Although support is not universal, most households view molluscan aquaculture as a beneficial use of state waters.

States like Connecticut can use this information to identify what types of new aquaculture would gain the strongest public support. Findings of this type can help states consider the values and preferences of the public when planning for different possible uses of the coastal zone.

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