

The Crest

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Chesapeake Bay
National Estuarine
Research Reserve
in Virginia

a fair Bay Spring
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Domestic Interest Grows in Cobia Culture

By Mike Oesterling

After one full year of growth, the first U.S.-spawned-and-raised cobia (*Rachycentron canadum*) weighed more than 8 pounds. This tremendous growth rate has piqued domestic interest in its commercial culture.

Numerous questions need to be answered before investors might be willing to commit to cobia aquaculture. Besides the obvious ones about production technology, an important consideration is just how the cultured product will compare to wild-harvested cobia in the marketplace. To begin answering this question, graduate student Patrick Kilduff conducted two evaluation tests using VIMS-cultured cobia and wild-harvested Chesapeake Bay cobia. The first, a triangle test, had taste-testers attempt to identify the odd sample out of three pieces of prepared cobia. Not designed to identify preference, the test identified whether a noticeable taste difference existed. Approximately two-thirds of the panelists could identify the "different" sample.

The second test conducted by Kilduff was a head-to-head preference test where panelists were asked to choose the piece of cobia they liked best. Each panelist was given two pieces of prepared cobia — one cultured and one wild. They were then asked to indicate which one they preferred, respond to other product questions, and provide comments. The panelists split almost equally in their choices, indicating little difference in the two products and a readily marketable cultured product.

The success of the cobia project served as a catalyst to bring together other scientists interested in cobia culture and resulted in a collaborative, 2-year research effort funded by the



VIMS faculty, staff, and students participated in the cobia taste testing.

federal government. Scientists and private entrepreneurs from Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Massachusetts have now teamed up with VIMS scientists to develop the basic information necessary to fast-track commercial cobia culture.

(NOTE: This article appears in the Fall 2001 Marine Resource Bulletin under the title: Cultured Cobia Satisfies Tastebuds.)



VIMS Foundation Established

The VIMS Foundation, a separate 501(c) 3 organization established in September, has received initial gifts of \$530,000 from numerous donors. The Foundation has also received pledges for an additional \$800,000 to be paid over the next three years. VIMS is planning an endowment campaign to raise \$10 million by 2007 to support faculty, students and scientific equipment and technology.

The Foundation's mission is to solicit private gifts and property for VIMS and administer and manage these funds to support VIMS mission of research, education and advisory service. "The VIMS Foundation has a unique opportunity to help VIMS achieve its goals —buying new research equipment, supporting outstanding students and faculty —this support ensures that VIMS will remain com-

petitive and able to produce cutting edge research," said Dean and Director L. Donelson Wright.

The Foundation Board members include: A. Marshall Acuff, Jr., Thomas Blackburn, Arthur H. Bryant II, Clifford A. Cutchins III, E. Morgan Massey and Guilford Ware. "We are confident that establishing the Foundation will increase support for VIMS important work," said Foundation President E. Morgan Massey.

VIMS Named World Reference
Laboratory
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OIE recruited VIMS for reference laboratory status based on the Institute's long history of research on *Perkinsus* and *Haplosporidium* and because of current research and international collaboration on diagnosis of diseases caused by these organisms. The shellfish pathology and histology skills of Burreson, Ms. Lisa Ragone Calvo and Ms. Rita Crockett are widely recognized. Molecular diagnostic (DNA) tools for identifying these disease agents developed at VIMS by

Burreson, Dr. Kimberly Reece, and Ms. Nancy Stokes are being used worldwide.

"This is a real honor, in recognition of the significant breakthroughs we have made at VIMS in the diagnosis of these shellfish pathogens that occur worldwide," Burreson said. "It will also mean some additional work, but we have a great team in shellfish pathology and we are glad to be of service to the international community."

Reference laboratories serve as an advisory resource for the OIE and as an identification resource for researchers around the world. The labs are also obligated to develop and standardize diagnostic protocols for relevant

disease agents and to provide a diagnostic service for researchers around the world. OIE has been responsible for promoting and coordinating research into the surveillance and control of animal diseases throughout the world since 1924.

Serious diseases that should be contained from accidental geographic spread are designated "notifiable" by OIE. This designation can restrict the export of animal products from a country that has the disease. *Perkinsus* and *Haplosporidium* are found worldwide and cause notifiable diseases. "We are already receiving requests and samples from around the world," Burreson said.