



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
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NOAA expands opportunities for U.S. aquaculture

Groundbreaking rule opens the door for seafood farming in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico

NOAA filed a final rule today implementing the nation's first comprehensive regulatory program for aquaculture in federal waters. The groundbreaking rule creates a coordinated permitting system for the Gulf of Mexico, opening the door for the region to expand seafood production and create new jobs in an environmentally sustainable manner.

“As demand for seafood continues to rise, aquaculture presents a tremendous opportunity not only to meet this demand, but also to increase opportunities for the seafood industry and job creation,” said Kathryn Sullivan, Ph.D., NOAA administrator. “Expanding U.S. aquaculture in federal waters complements wild harvest fisheries and supports our efforts to maintain sustainable fisheries and resilient oceans.”

Aquaculture is the practice of raising marine species in controlled environments. In the U.S., federal waters begin where state jurisdiction ends and extend out to 200 miles offshore. In this case, federal waters begin three nautical miles off Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama and nine nautical miles off Texas and the west coast of Florida.

“While this framework is the first of its kind in federal waters, the states already support many successful and thriving aquaculture operations in their waters,” said Eileen Sobeck, assistant NOAA administrator for fisheries. “Allowing this type of seafood production will not only reduce U.S. dependency on imports, but also provide a domestic source of sustainable fish protein and create jobs.”

The new rule authorizes [NOAA Fisheries](#) to issue permits to grow species such as red drum, cobia, and almaco jack in federal waters in the Gulf for an initial period of 10 years. The rule took into account thousands of public comments.

The permit process includes comprehensive safeguards to ensure healthy oceans and coasts and considers other uses of ocean space, such as fishing. The rule implements environmental

safeguards, including a baseline survey, monitoring, and reporting requirements. In addition to a NOAA permit, farming fish in federal waters also requires permits from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. NOAA Fisheries is working with these agencies to set up a coordinated permitting process for the Gulf.

”This is all about managing and expanding seafood farming in an environmentally sound and economically sustainable way,” said Michael Rubino, director, NOAA Fisheries Office of Aquaculture. “The permit process we’ve laid out accounts for the region’s unique needs and opens the door for other regions to follow suit.”

Right now, there are no commercial aquaculture operations in federal waters. But three offshore mussel farms received federal permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last year — two off Massachusetts and one off California. The Army Corps and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are also considering an application for a company seeking to farm fish in federal waters off California.

Commercial farming of marine species, such as oysters, clams, mussels and salmon, have operated in state waters for many years. For example, U.S. aquaculture products generated \$1.4 billion in value in 2013 — 20 percent of total U.S. seafood production and fishery products by value.

For more information on this rule, please

visit: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/stories/2016/01/offshore_aq_rule.html

For more information on U.S. marine aquaculture go

to: <http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/aquaculture/index.htm>

For B-roll on U.S. marine aquaculture, go to: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/gallery/videos/>

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