

Oyster Farming.

EDITOR "THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE":

From early Roman days down to the present, the oyster has held first place as a table delicacy. This is due, not only to the favoritism of the epicure, but also, because of its high food value, and its economy.

An Oyster farm in Texas is far more valuable than a land farm is; it is also far more interesting. One might think it would be an easy matter to farm water, but the oyster farmer will assure you that it is no snap at any stage of the game. Owing to the long growing season, and the mild climate, Texas offers a prolific field for the culture of oysters. There are so many natural oyster beds in the numerous lakes, bays and coves along the coast that the oyster farmer never lacks seed for the sowing.

Only a bona-fide resident of the State of Texas may obtain an oyster farm in the state. As much as fifty acres may be located. A small surveying fee of approximately \$10.00, and a yearly rental of ten cents an acre is paid for the first five years after which the farmer pays a yearly rental of twenty-five cents an acre.

Like the land farmer, the oyster farmer must first prepare his land, plant his seed, and harvest his crop. He must see that there is a suitable bottom for the cultivation of oysters. This means a firm substratum overlaid with a soft bed of mud. A muddy bottom is to be preferred to a firm, sandy one, as it is more likely to be stocked with the small organisms on which the young, or seed oysters feed. Even in muddy bottoms it is necessary to prepare the surface in some way in order to prevent the oyster becoming submerged and suffocated in the soft deposit of mud. In making new beds man must follow Nature's plan. Choosing a location free from too severe currents and supplied with food, the debris is cleared away and a suitable bottom or bed is prepared for the "spat" to light upon. Oyster shells, clam shells, gravel or sand is strewn around, serving the double purpose of preventing the young oysters becoming submerged and affording places to attach themselves.

There are two ways of planting, either the "seed" oysters being used or the "spat" which has been caught in the spawning bed.

Oysters spawn in the spring of the year. A female usually produces 16,000,000 young, which, at spawning time, are mere microscopic specks. This may seem like 'some family', but scientists tell us the oyster has but one chance in a million to grow up.

After spawning, these tiny, whirling specks float away from the parent oyster and swim about until the first appearance of shell. Then, the free life ceases, and the minute oyster becomes attached to some support, and proceeds to develop his crust or shell. It is henceforth known as a 'spat'.

If the water is warm and the bottom well-supplied with shells, rocks or other supports, a good 'set' may be expected; a cold spell will kill the young, and rough water will drift them out to sea.

Oyster reefs, old banks of oyster shells and rocks, are furnished by Nature for a nursery, but the oyster farmer can make as good a one with limbs of trees, tin cans, shells, brush and scrap iron.

The 'spat', when large enough to be transplanted, are known as 'seed' oysters. These may be very small or good sized ones which will be ready for the market in five or six months after bedding.

The seed is sown at the rate of from three to six hundred bushels per acre. It is scattered over the beds as evenly as possible from boats. The farms are as evenly staked out and planned as are the land farms.

The oyster farmer has to experiment in order to find out the best fattening grounds. This entails the expenditure of much time and some capital. The growing and fattening conditions may be exceedingly good but there may be currents which would carry all the food organisms away.

Sometimes stockades have to be built to protect the oyster beds from the fish. The thrifty oyster farmer will protect his beds by driving stakes into the bottom close enough to prevent the passage of fish between them.

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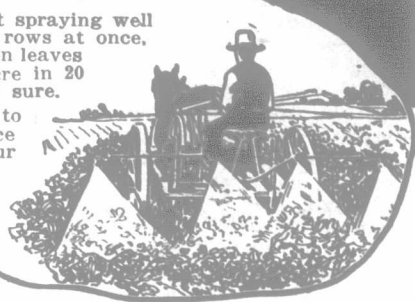
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