

## SECTIONAL REVIEWS

### Chesapeake

MARYLAND: The price drop which so seriously affected the oyster market, after meat became more available, seemed about to be halted early in January as prices

to the oysterman improved from \$2 or less per bushel to around \$3.50. Competitive bidding among dealers was held principally responsible for the increased price. Certain dealers ventured to predict a shortage of oysters.



OYSTER BOAT

Production has been restricted by the continuing effects of the widespread mortality of bay oysters in early 1946. Too much rain is generally agreed upon as the cause, and the beds will probably require about 3 years to recover. Most of these beds are in areas controlled by the State and are opened or closed by the Commissioner of Fisheries as conditions warrant. Dredging by sail power is the principal means of harvesting these oysters.

On a bed recently opened in Kent county, dredgers averaged 125 bushels per vessel per day, but even this is not a record harvest. On another State-controlled bed, lately opened, tongs took as many as 90 bushels per boat (2 men) per day. Dredgers carry crews of three to five men and two dredges. To meet the expenses of stocking the beds with seed oysters or shells or both, the State levies a tax of 20 cents per bushel on oysters taken from controlled areas.

Bay oysters were generally fat and in good condition, but seaside oysters were not. The latter, which come mainly from upper Chincoteague Bay, are in good demand at raw bars. In order to meet the standards of this trade, oysters must be single, regularly shaped, and of pleasing appearance when opened. Consequently, considerable selecting is necessary, and the price increases accordingly. Bar stock from Worcester, Maryland's only seaside county, brought \$12 a barrel. So far this season, in view of the poor condition of Worcester oysters, bar stock has been scarce.

In 1943, the State decided to legalize, under certain conditions relating to size and location, the much-discussed crab pot. Now in 1947, a review of the results seems in order. The number of pots licensed has about doubled each year as many crabbers have abandoned trotlines for pots. However, a great deal of trotline crabbing is still practiced in waters where crab pots are prohibited. If a trotline crabber decides to operate pots, he must go to the areas in the open bay where they are permitted, usually some distance from home.

Striped bass, or rock, were fairly plentiful during December. Some were caught in nets throughout the winter. In warmer weather, sportsmen also bring in large numbers. Fishing for rock is one of the mainstays of Maryland's hook-and-line profession. It is possible for hook-and-liners who work at it to catch enough to make a substantial profit. One dealer cited the instance of two men selling him rock over a period of 2 weeks. They fished 4 lines each, baited with locally-caught shrimp, used one boat, and sold their catch for \$800.

Eastern Bay is the favorite ground for rock-fishing for sport. During the vacation season, as many as 100 boats a day may be seen there. On good days, boats may average 100 pounds apiece. The shrimp used for bait are not the edible species. They are caught along shore by a man wading with a small push net on rollers. They sell for about \$6 per gallon.



## South Atlantic

FLORIDA: Fish production during the months of January and February was rather erratic. The West Coast reported landings about normal for this time of year. East Coast ports, on the other hand, reported landings far lighter than usual.

Many reasons have been advanced for the decreased production on the east coast. The consensus points to the unusually long spell of warm weather which prevailed without a break. The short period of cool weather needed to concentrate the fish on the fishing grounds had not appeared.

Unlike most varieties, grouper were a glut on the market with uncut fish in retail markets moderately priced. Fishermen still received ex-vessel prices, approximating wartime prices. Consumers, however, have been able to purchase grouper in retail markets quite reasonably.

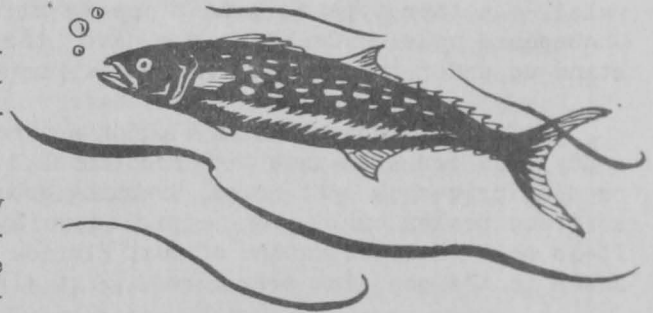
Grouper is a fish that is not a profitable fillet item. The yield is only about 33 percent. To this the dealer must add the cost of labor, ice, and packaging, which will run relatively high in this section of the Gulf. This puts grouper fillets almost in the luxury class. It is, therefore, impossible to compete with New England or imported fillets which sell for little more than half the price, in car lots. The result is that practically no fish is packaged in the Gulf area. Many firms were holding large supplies of grouper with little prospect of breaking even.

The large snapper producers are also handicapped. They must sell grouper, as the snapper alone are not sufficient to make a trip pay.

Spanish mackerel has been probably the most reasonable item in retail markets. Although it has an ex-vessel price comparable to grouper, unlike the grouper, Spanish mackerel will fillet out as well as haddock. A few firms have cut some fillets and put them in the freezer. The tendency was, however, away from cutting since most dealers did not want to put that much money in one item on a declining market and the bulk of the mackerel went into the freezer as is; that is, drawn only.

Northern markets did not absorb expected quantities of mackerel and it has never been a big southern seller. A number of the restaurants, however, have featured Spanish mackerel fillets on their regular meals.

Of grave concern to many, in Florida, during this period, was the heavy fish mortality. Although some accounts listed only bottom fish as the principal casual-

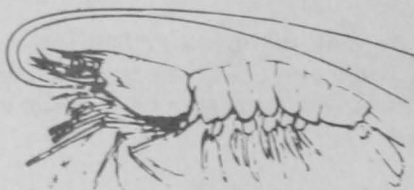


SPANISH MACKEREL

ties, sport fish were also affected. Tarpon, black and red drum, speckled trout, in fact, practically all species except grouper, snapper, and other deep water fish, suffered. The heaviest casualties seemed to be among black drum. They were washed ashore in unbelievable numbers.

Several reasons have been advanced for the mortality, all of which centered around warm weather. It was noted, however, that quantities of fish were washed ashore in the vicinity of Naples where neither the water nor the weather was warm during the time that this mortality occurred.

Up to February, the St. John's River run of shad was judged to be about only one-third the normal production. If a good "run" does not appear before shad arrives in the rivers to the north, usually before March, fishermen and dealers are likely to be affected financially. They depend on the early high prices that prevail in northern markets for the bulk of their income from this fishery.



The shrimp fleet, which is about twice the size of the fleet in 1944, experienced some difficulty in making profitable trips. Many trawlers were reported returning to port with only 20 or 30 pounds of shrimp to show for a couple of days of dragging. Profitable operation requires production about 50 times greater.

Crab pots in Florida are replacing trotlines, to a great extent. Their use is not subject to as many restrictions, as in Maryland and Virginia. The number fished by a fisherman is not limited. There are no specifications as to mesh size or locality of use.

The Florida pot, which is referred to as a "trap," bears little resemblance to the patented crab pot of the Chesapeake. It is, in many cases, a slat box made of laths or palmetto stalks. A wire is attached to the inside on which bait is impaled. Another type is made of heavy wire mesh, sturdier than the chicken-wire Chesapeake model. Crabbers who have studied the Chesapeake pot say it will not stand up under the onslaughts of the large, powerful Florida blue crab.

Soft crab propagation in Florida apparently could be the subject for biological study. Dealers know that the exceptional size attained by Florida crabs would bring premium prices as soft crabs. Crabbing grounds like those in the Chesapeake, where soft and peeler crabs may be picked up by dip-netters have not yet been found. It is said that the nature of most Florida crabbing grounds is to offer protective cover to the shedding crabs, making it difficult to find them.

Up to the present, no use has been made of the quantities of crab refuse from crab meat houses. In the Jacksonville area, this refuse amounts to about 2 million pounds annually. One company, however, has ordered dehydrating equipment and plans to go into the production of meal.

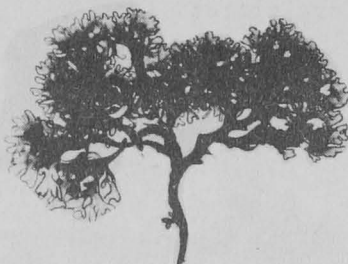
Pollution has wiped out oyster production from Fernandina to New Smyrna. Extensive clam beds have suffered, equally, with the oysters. The most extensive destruction has probably been reached at Fernandina, because of the discharge of pulp mill wastes into the Amelia River. Not only were oyster beds wiped out here, but fish, porpoises, and sea turtles, were seen floating, killed from having ventured too close to shore.

Oyster shucking on the East Coast contributes little to the shell and lime industry. The raw material for this operation comes from extensive oyster-shell reefs or deposits found in marshes, along the coast, near Jacksonville. For the privilege of dredging such reefs, the manufacturer pays a royalty per ton of shells removed. The beds, extending to a depth of 60 feet or more, are supposed to have been built up, during several centuries, from natural bars and have no connection with the shell piles left by Indian settlements.



## THE MAINE SEA MOSS INDUSTRY

"The collecting of Irish moss or carrageen (*Chondrus crispus*) constitutes the oldest seaweed industry in the United States. For a century it has been harvested and sold, chiefly for making blancmange. More recently, a commercially useful extract, carrageenin, has been prepared from it, to serve as a stabilizer in chocolate milk, salad dressing, soda fountain sirups, cough sirups, toothpaste, hand lotions, cosmetics, paint, beer, and many pharmaceutical products. At present, the range in the uses of sea moss appears to be limited only by human ingenuity.



SEA MOSS

"Although, according to historical data, it was in 1835 that sea moss was first gathered in Ireland, it was not discovered in this country (at Scituate, Mass.) until 1847. Despite the fact that the American moss was superior to the imported variety, increasing costs gradually made its harvest prohibitive until World War II shut off imported supplies of the gelatinous submarine growth and revived the industry in this country. With the war, plus expanding uses for the moss, came an ever increasing demand for the seaweed. Not only did the industry revive and expand in Massachusetts, but the discovery of prolific beds of moss all along the Maine coast gave impetus to that industry in this State as well.

"The harvesting season for sea moss is from the first of May through the early part of September with the exception of about a week in August, when it blooms. Although the flowering period for moss varies with locale and weather conditions there will be some beds where the moss is later in blooming, so that by careful observation of local conditions, the mossier may continue to rake moss throughout the month. However, areas which are in bloom should not be gathered until the sticky fine green or grayish green growth in the heads of the moss, which characterizes the bloom, has disappeared; either through maturity or as the result of a storm."

--Bulletin of the Department of Sea and Shore Fisheries