

Florida Department of Agriculture
and Consumer Services

Division of Aquaculture

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Aquaculture_Web@FDACS.gov

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Division of Aquaculture

The core responsibilities of the Division of Aquaculture are described in Chapter 597, Florida Aquaculture Policy Act, Florida Statutes, and include:

- Developing and enforcing environmental and food safety regulations governing commercial aquaculture production and shellfish (clams, oysters and mussels) harvesting and processing, respectively.
- Certifying and inspecting shellfish processing facilities and classifying and monitoring shellfish harvesting areas in accordance with National Shellfish Sanitation Program.
- Leasing coastal state submerged land for aquacultural purposes.
- Certifying and inspecting upland commercial aquaculture facilities for compliance with the Aquaculture Best Management Practices.
- Providing practical and technical assistance concerning regulations, production, financial assistance, or educational programs.

For the open or closed status of Shellfish Harvesting Areas, call:

Apalachicola Shellfish Center (850) 653-8317
Cedar Key Office (352) 543-5181
Melbourne Office (321) 984-4890
Panama City Office (850) 236-2200
Port Charlotte Office (941) 613-0954
Tallahassee Office (850) 617-7600

For Aquaculture Certificate of Registration, Aquaculture Best Management Practices, call:

Bartow Office (863) 578-1870
Tallahassee Office (850) 617-7600

For the leasing of submerged state lands and shellfish processing certification information, call:

Tallahassee Office (850) 617-7600

Florida Aquaculture

Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS)
Division of Aquaculture

FDACS Receives NOAA Grant Award of \$2.9 Million for Aquaculture

We are excited to share that the Division of Aquaculture has received a \$2.9 million grant from NOAA to clean up aquaculture marine debris from parcels impacted by the 2023–2024 hurricane season near Cedar Key, Florida.

This three-year project is to support leaseholders: to restore aquaculture sites and protect the environment by removing marine debris.

Originally scheduled to begin in November 2025, the project start date has been temporarily delayed due to the federal government shutdown. The Division will provide timeline and detailed instructions for participation after receiving updates from NOAA.

What Leaseholders Can Expect:

- Watch your inbox for an interest questionnaire and invitations to informational webinars as the project moves forward.
- The Division plans to work closely with leaseholders throughout the debris removal process to ensure a smooth and effective cleanup effort.
- Work completed before the official project start date will not be eligible for funding, and any fraudulent activity could end participation in the program.
- Please note: This funding cannot be used for corner marker replacement or other unrelated expenses.

The Division appreciates your patience and partnership as we prepare to launch this important recovery effort!

For questions or more information, contact Aquaculture_Web@FDACS.gov.

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Certified Shellfish Processing Facility Monthly Production Report Now Electronic

All certified shellfish processing facilities are required to submit a monthly production report to FDACS Division of Aquaculture. The production report is a summary of all wild and farmed shellfish received directly from harvesters.

In September 2025 the Processing Plant Compliance and Inspection Program (PPCIP) launched an electronic monthly production report form for certified shellfish processing facilities used to submit their monthly production report. Reminder emails are sent at the beginning of each month and include a link to the electronic form, or you may use the link on the PPCIP webpage: www.FDACS.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Aquaculture/Shellfish-Processing-Facility-Certification. Accurate and timely reporting is critical to managing shellfish and for the Division to comply with mandatory reporting requirements set forth by the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC).



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Notice to Leaseholders: Modifications of a Lease Requires Approval from FDACS Division of Aquaculture

As hardworking shellfish farmers, leaseholders benefit coastal communities and act as stewards of Florida’s natural resources. All leaseholders must maintain an Aquaculture Certificate of Registration and must comply with the terms of the lease agreement and all applicable Aquaculture Best Management Practices.

Leaseholders are reminded that any modification to an aquaculture submerged land lease must receive prior approval from the Division. Modifications include, but are not limited to the addition of cultured species (i.e., macroalgae, scallops, urchins, etc.), changes in gear type (novel gear types may require an individual Army Corps permit) or culture method, conversion from bottom culture to water column use (will require publicly noticing the change in activity and further Board of Trustees and USCG approval). Leaseholders must contact the Division in advance of implementing any changes to ensure continued compliance.

As a reminder, only approved native species can be cultured and upwellers or platforms may not be moored on leases. Current approved gear includes floating baskets, suspended longline, off-bottom baskets, bottom trays and bottom bags. If new gear or species are being proposed, a work plan must first be provided to the Division. Importation of seed from any other state requires additional health and genetic documentation and approval by the Division prior to importation.

The [Aquaculture Portal](#) makes it easy to request a modification, lease transfer or add an authorized user. Keep in mind, in order to transfer your lease, five years must have passed since the execution date of the lease and the lease must also be in compliance. Please see the Guidance Documents located on the Leasing webpage for how to submit modification requests in the Aquaculture Portal: www.FDACS.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Aquaculture/Aquaculture-Submerged-Land-Leasing.

Industry Development and Outreach Updates

- During the first quarter of the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the Division and the Florida Shellfish Aquaculture Association (FSAA) selected ten projects out of eighteen applications to enhance Florida’s shellfish industry with \$500,000 allocated for the Gulf Coast Shellfish Nursery and Hatchery Research Grant. Thank you to everyone who submitted a proposal. The Division is excited to see this funding opportunity in action producing reliable and quality seed supply.
- The Division visited summer camps to inspire the next generation from pre-K to 5th grade. Expanding the outreach efforts, the Division spoke with Junior Seakeepers, a group of high school students interested in marine science careers.
- The Division developed various publications and activities specifically for Florida educators. These publications provide information on different aquaculture systems for their consideration, tips on starting their own aquaculture system, benefits to receiving an Aquaculture Certificate of Registration and even a system checklist to help educators encourage student participation while ensuring they are carefully monitoring key characteristics responsible for their systems success. These Division resources were highlighted at the Florida Association of Science Teachers (FAST) annual conference in Orlando.

To have the Division present at your next event, contact Aquaculture_Education@FDACS.gov.

Aquaculture Review Council Summary

The Aquaculture Review Council held its first quarterly meeting of the fiscal year on August 19th at the FDACS Office in Bartow. The Council members were presented final reports from fiscal year 2024-2025 award recipients.

The next ARC meeting will be held on November 18th at 9:00 AM EST at the Suncoast Youth Education Center, 6650 Dickman Road, Apollo Beach, Florida 33572. The Council members will finalize the 2026 Aquaculture Plan and prepare the fiscal year 2026-2027 Request for Statements of Interest. Be on the lookout for an email for due dates of the Statements of Interest.

For more information, contact ARC@FDACS.gov.

Division Staff Introductions



Ashley Swafford

Ashley joined the Division of Aquaculture in May 2025 as an Environmental Specialist II with the Education Development Project in the Tallahassee Office. She was born and raised in Oregon and previously worked as a field biologist helping conserve endangered and threatened species in the Pacific Northwest. She may be reached at (850) 617-7629 or by email at Ashley.Swafford@FDACS.gov.

Tara joined the Division of Aquaculture in July 2025 as a Planning Consultant with the Leasing Program in the Tallahassee Office. Bringing her past experience in FDACS Division of Licensing, she is excited to help aquaculture farmers and leaseholders. She can be reached at (850) 617-7608 or by email at Tara.Estep@FDACS.gov.



Tara Estep



Mike Loeb

Mike joined the Division of Aquaculture in August 2025 as a Biological Scientist IV in the Tallahassee Office with the Education and Development Project. He previously worked for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection focusing on coastal resilience. He earned a doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he studied animal behavior. Before joining the Division, he worked as a farmer and learned to grow and manufacture tea. Mike can be reached at (850) 617-7630 or by email at Michael.Loeb@FDACS.gov.

Dorly joined the Division of Aquaculture in August 2025 as an Environmental Specialist II in the Bartow Office for the Aquaculture Certificate and BMP program. She earned her master’s degree in aquaculture from the Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain and has hands-on experience on aquaculture production systems for shellfish and finfish. Her primary expertise is in shrimp aquaculture, with specialization in production and health management of white-leg shrimp in Ecuador, where she worked as technical advisor. She can be reached at (863)307-1087 or by email at Dorly.Cevallos@FDACS.gov.



Dorly Cevallos



Hannah Morgan

Hannah joined the Division of Aquaculture in October 2025 as an Environmental Specialist II with the Shellfish Harvesting Area Classification Program in the Panama City Office. She received her associate’s degree at Gulf Coast State College and her bachelor’s in Biology at University of Central Florida in Orlando. Before joining the Division of Aquaculture she worked with the Florida Forest Service as a Park Ranger in Panama City Beach. She can be reached at (850) 510-4901 or by email at Hannah.Morgan@FDACS.gov.