



## **#FridaysOnTheFarm: Risk Program Pays Off for Shellfish Hatchery**

From the kitchen table to the boardroom table, USDA brings people together across the nation for: healthier food, natural resources and people; a stronger agricultural industry; and economic growth, jobs and innovation.

Each Friday, meet those farmers, producers and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests and resource areas where USDA customers and partners do right and feed everyone.

This Friday, meet Curtis Hemmel, owner and operator of [Bay Shellfish Company](#), located on Terra Ceia Island, Florida. The hatchery was one of the many operations devastated by Hurricane Irma in 2017.

### **Hatching a Business**

Opened in 1996, Bay Shellfish Company is the first commercial hatchery to produce commercial oyster seed in the state.

“We produce shellfish for research, restoration and commercial production,” said Curtis. The company is one of the largest and oldest operations in the southeast United States to produce bivalve seed for the clam and oyster farming industry.

### **The Storm**

On Sept. 10, 2017, Hurricane Irma made landfall in Florida, impacting communities and agricultural operations across the state. Curtis was one of the many producers who sustained damage and losses caused by the devastating storm.

“The good news is we had time to prepare for the storm,” Curtis said. “We had about three days to evacuate as much equipment from our facility as we could. We were very lucky in that respect.”

While they could evacuate some of the equipment, some items, due to size and weight, had to be left behind.

“Had we not evacuated equipment and reinforced what was left, we would’ve lost more production time than we did,” he said.



While his family evacuated the island before the bridges were closed, Curtis and an employee stayed on the property during the storm.

“We had significant physical losses,” he said. “All of the roofs on our greenhouses were damaged. We didn’t have the choice to take those off before the storm because they were a source of protection for what was underneath. We had to take our chance and hope for the best.”

## **Recovery**

According to Curtis, between the massive amounts of rain and the lack of electricity, the majority of the shellfish in the nursery died.

“We were without power for five days,” he said. “Our operation requires a fair amount of electricity to run and there were just too many areas to cover with the generators we had.”

Curtis was able to recover some of his losses after the storm because of coverage he had through the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program \(NAP\)](#), a safety-net program offered by the USDA [Farm Service Agency \(FSA\)](#). NAP provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops when low yields, loss of inventory or prevented planting occur due to natural disasters.

Curtis enrolled his shellfish in the program in 2011 and has maintained coverage ever since. “Thank goodness for NAP, it gave us needed risk mitigation,” he said. “NAP is an essential program. Programs like this are so important to the growth of the U.S. aquaculture industry, it allows people to continue to operate.”

## **Giving Back**

Along with his commercial interests, Bay Shellfish Company helps with various research projects to improve the industry and move it forward. The company helped start the Gulf Shellfish Institute in 2015, a non-profit with a mission to “facilitate, support and encourage increased production of shellfish in Florida and the Gulf region for both economic and environmental benefit.”

To give back, Bay Shellfish Company has been committed to the Florida Bay Scallop restoration efforts. For over 10 years, Curtis has been able to grow a variety of scallop sizes to be released into the bay.



“I’ve always believed it’s important to look at the big picture and give back to your community,” he said. “We are committed to help with restoration in any way we can.”

## More Information

Deadlines to apply for NAP coverage vary by state and crop. To enroll, [contact your local FSA office](#) to schedule an appointment.

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster, loan and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)

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