

# Mariculture

## *Farming of Sea Life*



Seed oysters.



Market oysters.

When you hear the word 'farm' what do you picture? A field, with a tractor and lots of crops? Or maybe a large hilly area with cows eating? That is what we think of, too. But, did you know there are also farms that grow sea life? This type of farming is called 'mariculture,' the culture (farming) of marine (ocean) species. It is also called 'aquaculture,' although this term includes the farming of both salt water and fresh water species.

Mariculture is much like traditional farming except the crops are grown in water – sea water. Marine crops are grown either directly in the ocean, or on land in tanks that have ocean water pumped into them. In the Santa Barbara Channel, oysters, mussels and white seabass are grown in the ocean in cages. Abalone and limpets (types of marine snails) and California halibut are grown on land in tanks.

Ocean animals are grown for different reasons. Oysters, mussels, abalone and California halibut are grown for the many people that like to eat them. White seabass may also eventually end up on your dish, but the ones grown here are used for 'enhancing' the ocean. Instead of being sold to restaurants, these farmed fish are grown to a certain size and then set free in the ocean. They then reproduce, giving the ocean more young seabass. Giant keyhole limpets are being raised for a very different reason – one you will never guess! Their blood is special and is being used in certain medical tests. Some day, it may also be part of the treatment for some cancers and other sicknesses. Can you believe that?

Just like with other types of farming, ocean farmers have to know a lot about what they are growing. Understanding what the crop needs to grow is a good place to start. For example, oysters and mussels only eat the tiny

little plants and animals (plankton) that we can't see in the water. Known as 'filter feeders,' these shellfish just need seawater that has a lot of tiny food. Abalone need more than just seawater, they eat seaweed. Abalone farmers must either grow the seaweed or get it from the ocean to feed their abalone crop. Seabass, California halibut and other fish and shellfish eat even more. They eat other types of fish and marine animals. Ocean farmers must take care of their crops until they are ready to harvest, which can take some time! Oysters and mussels may only take a year or so before they end up on a dinner plate. But, abalone take 3 to 4 years to grow to market size. That is a much longer time to wait, but they are sold for more money, which helps.

As you can see, the waters of the SBC are very important for farming – although maybe not the type of farming you normally think of. Local ocean farmers are growing sea life that can satisfy our seafood cravings and even help with medical problems. These are just a few reasons you should treasure and take care of the ocean.

### True/False

- T  F **1.** Marine crops are grown only in the ocean.
- T  F **2.** Oysters eat plankton.
- T  F **3.** Abalone take 3-4 years to grow to market size.
- T  F **4.** California halibut are grown in ocean cages.
- T  F **5.** White seabass are filter feeders.
- T  F **6.** Ocean water is pumped into tanks to grow some marine animals.
- T  F **7.** Seaweed is fed to abalone.
- T  F **8.** Giant keyhole limpet blood is used for some types of medical testing.
- T  F **9.** Ocean crops are used only for food.
- T  F **10.** Mariculture and aquaculture are exactly the same.



Keyhole limpets

