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**OCEAN COUNTY SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT AND PARTNERS
AWARDED \$961,227 FOR NJ COASTAL AQUACULTURE PROJECT FROM THE
USDA-NRCS REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM**

Forked River, NJ – Today, the OCSCD in Ocean County, NJ announced that along with their partners they were awarded funding for a Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) project from the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS or NRCS).

Along with a diverse group of partners, the Ocean County Soil Conservation District (OCSCD or District) has been awarded \$961,227 for their NJ COASTAL Aquaculture Project (*Conservation Opportunities Advancing Sustainable Technologies for Aquaculture Leases*); of which 70% will go directly to shellfish aquaculture producers. Project partners will provide technical assistance and an additional \$961,227 in match through cash and in-kind contributions, partners include: NJDEP Bureau of Shellfisheries, NJ Department of Agriculture, Long Beach Township, the Barnegat Bay Partnership, ReClam the Bay, Cape Atlantic Conservation District, Stockton University, Parsons Mariculture, Forty North Oyster Farms/Barnegat Oyster Collective, Jetty Rock Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the Nature Conservancy (NJ Chapter) and the New Jersey Aquaculture Association.

The overarching goals of the NJ COASTAL Aquaculture Project are to promote aquatic habitat on shellfish leases and enhance water quality throughout the Coastal Bays of New Jersey (with a focus on the Barnegat and Great Bay region) by increasing producer participation in NRCS conservation programs. An additional goal of this RCPP project is the implementation of new conservation practice scenarios connecting producers with restoration projects. Through implementation of this program, the District will coordinate and collaborate with partners to achieve natural resource improvements while connecting with an unconventional and underserved group of producers. Increasing oyster populations and improving water quality within the Barnegat and Great Bay region can be fulfilled through restoration initiatives as well as supporting the aquaculture industry. The NJ COASTAL Aquaculture Project serves to make connections between farmers and NRCS and farmers to restoration; these linkages are critical to ensuring continued, future success for natural resource enhancement within our nation's estuaries.

“The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.”

Visit [the USDA-NRCS RCPP webpage](#) to learn more about the grant program.

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Representatives from OCSCD (Kristin Adams), Stockton University (Dr. Christine Thompson & Steve Evert) and Jetty Rock Foundation (Julia Tomelden, Kyle Gronostajski, & Jackie Sweeney) discuss oyster restoration at Stockton University's Mill Creek Reef – photo by Susan Allen