

Moses and the Wonderers

There is an often-told story of a man who, in concert with others, wondered for generations, letting time cull the weak.

It takes a near-religious fervor to press on without support, like those people in the desert. This is the way it works in a society known for its 'rugged individualism.' This is way of a Frontier society.

Multi Aquaculture Systems (MAS) has operated successfully as an onshore aquaculture enterprise in Amagansett, NY for nearly 40 years (just like those wanderers). The company has ranched, hatched, brooded, nurtured, held, sold, distributed, and exported nearly every fish and shellfish species native to New York waters.

In 2009, an opportunity arose to obtain a lease for 200 acres of coastal New York waters that are permitted for raising fin fish in what are called net pens. Others have tried and failed at marine aquaculture at that site and elsewhere in the U.S. MAS recognized that it could become a fully integrated aquaculture company by bringing an offshore site into the mix with its onshore facilities.

MAS would be unique, and whole.

The end of the journey was in vision, if not yet in sight. There was still a desert to be crossed. That desert meant no support systems, no:

- Rational or quick response from the NY Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), which required 16 months to change the species on the permit from summer flounder (*Paralichthus dentatus*) to striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*).
- Discovery that the DEC relies on decades-old computer systems, and that large stacks of paper must be physically mailed and re-mailed to various agency branches, one step at a time, losing a days or weeks with every transfer of *paper*.
- When the DEC permits finally arrived, an out-of-thin-air discriminatory requirement was added that no fish grown in the offshore net pens can be sold unless they are D-E-A-D. This restriction is in place despite the fact that every state around New York allows the sale of live fish from aquaculture, and that shellfish and crustaceans (scallops, clams, lobsters, oysters, bait) can be raised by aquaculturists and sold live in New York. A Live Fish is worth 25% more on the market than a dead fish.
- No politician on the State, Federal, or County level stood up and noted the benefits of having an indigenous marine aquaculture industry in New York.
- No funding was available from National Marine Fisheries in any form. The NOAA stance on marine aquaculture was found to focus on research and low level university studies,

not commercialization, despite a National Ocean Policy that directs that *development of marine offshore aquaculture is in the National Interest*.

- The New York State Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation refused to allow the company to use a remote beach for the week-long assembly and launch of the net pens, despite that fact that over a thousand acres of such abandoned property is adjacent to the onshore aquaculture facility.
- No government subsidies of any kind were used in the development of the offshore facility or its onshore support facilities.

There were a few bright moments of public interest, such as when the East Hampton Fishermen's Council sent a letter of support to the State Parks Department when Multi Aquaculture requested use of an abandoned beach for one week of assembly and launch. The new County Supervisor has expressed an interest in being kept abreast of the progress of the project, noting that it could become a significant initiative.

And many commercial fishermen and friends of Multi Aquaculture have given advice and put a shoulder to the process of putting together all the pieces that are now in operation.

We thank these precious few for their enlightened interest and sometimes strenuous efforts in support of this unique enterprise.

As for the government, politicians and the press, it has become evident that lip service is the only service available for new industries, new avenues of employment, and a new way to provide native ocean grown seafood from the area's premier aquaculture company.

[A little background: on average, each citizen of the U.S. consumes over 16 lbs of seafood per year (the Daily Livestock Report). Many domestic fisheries in the U.S. and around the world are in serious decline due to efficient overfishing, pollution, and climate change. This has engendered the rise of industrial scale aquaculture, which produced over half the seafood consumed worldwide in 2011 (Stanford report 2009).

The U.S. annually imports more than \$9 billion more seafood than it produces. With China dominating that market like it does a number of others: cheap products made (grown) with few environmental restrictions. Oriental food fish have flooded the world markets and, in the process, have blurred the understanding that freshwater fish are not marine animals, and thus offer very little in the way of healthy Omega 3 fatty acids.

The marine finfish aquaculture industry is very large, but not in the U.S. The Multi Aquaculture Offshore Fish Farm is the best first step taken in a long time to address that problem.]

