



New Marketing Campaign Highlights the Economic and Environmental Impact of Oysters in St. Mary's County

LEONARDTOWN, Md., October 1, 2026 – [Visit St. Mary's MD](#) and [Maryland's agriCoast St. Mary's County](#) are inviting visitors and residents to discover the story behind one of Southern Maryland's most iconic foods: Oysters. Through a combination of online resources, marketing, and storytelling, visitors will learn about the important role oysters play in the region's culture, history, ecology, and economy.

"For over 30 years, I have been fishing on the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, and I have seen firsthand the benefits of a strong oyster industry," said Jeff Pharis, owner and operator of Bay River Fishing, LLC. "We live in an area that allows us to fish in the morning, deliver fresh oysters in the afternoon, and you can enjoy them that same evening at home or at a local restaurant. It does not get much fresher than that."

The waters surrounding St. Mary's County are home to countless Oyster varieties, available year-round, through wild caught and farm-raised options. Considered 'brackish', a mix of fresh and salt water, the Chesapeake Bay creates a unique oyster flavor: not-too-salty, not-too-sweet.

Maryland's Only Interactive Oyster Trail

[Visit St. Mary's MD](#) and [Maryland's agriCoast St. Mary's County](#) have partnered with "Let's Rallie!" to create the St. Mary's County Oyster Trail. Visitors and residents can discover retailers, learn about local oysters, and track progress as they explore sites.

How it works:

- Explore the Map. See locations along the Oyster Trail, including restaurants and markets.
- Check in Along the Way. Visit locations and check in through Let's Rallie app/website to track visits.
- More Stops = More Entries. The more locations participants visit and check-in, the more giveaway entries they can earn for a chance to win unique prizes.
- Find Special Oyster Events. Discover special oyster-related events and activities happening throughout the county.
- Stay in the Know. Turn on notifications to receive updates, news, and important alerts throughout the Oyster Trail.

Participants can download the free [Let's Rallie app](#) or use the web experience to participate.



Documentary: 'Waterman's Heritage - Oysters in St. Mary's County'

The new documentary tells the tale of the men and women who harvest oysters throughout the Chesapeake Bay, exploring their impact on bay restoration and how this seafood staple gets on dinner tables. The film follows four oyster businesses throughout the county: Bay River Fishing, Wild Willy's Seafood, Loose Stones Oyster Company and Double T Oyster Ranch, each representing a unique approach to oyster harvesting and farming practices. 'Waterman's Heritage' aims to educate viewers about the state of the industry and above all, make you hungry to visit restaurants and seafood markets in St. Mary's County.

Watch the documentary on Visit St. Mary's MD's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lylwkg9viGY>. Produced, directed and edited by Alyssa Reeves (Visit St. Mary's MD).

Event Spotlight: 60th Annual U.S. Oyster Festival in Leonardtown, Maryland

It is not uncommon to see an oyster shucker among the food vendors at a St. Mary's County event, but the annual [U.S. Oyster Festival](#), from October 17-18, blows that tradition out of the water.

For 60 years, this beloved two-day festival takes over the St. Mary's County Fairgrounds, celebrating the best of Southern Maryland and America's oyster culture and culminates in the U.S. National Oyster Shucking Championship. Top shuckers from across the nation compete for the title of U.S. National Champion and the opportunity to represent the country at the World Oyster Opening Championships in Galway, Ireland.

In addition to the shucking competition, attendees can visit a large tasting tent, watch live music, shop with artisan vendors, and enjoy loads of family-friendly fun all weekend long.

The event is planned and hosted by Rotary Club of Lexington Park and proceeds support countless community resources including scholarships and non-profit grants. Past beneficiaries include Feed St. Mary's, the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Maryland Chapter, Christmas in April St. Mary's County, Three Oaks Center, the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish, and Mike's Food Fund. The club also funds up to \$30,000 annually in academic scholarships for college-bound St. Mary's County seniors and provides direct grants to local non-profits running food pantries and other community programs.

[Buy tickets now](#) or [visit the U.S. Oyster Festival website](#)

Oyster blog on VisitStMarysMD.com

The county's tourism website has a new webpage dedicated to oysters. The blog features various resources designed to help visitors and residents plan their oyster experience in St. Mary's County. The page also includes information about the important environmental



impact oysters have on the region, safe handling and preparation resources, and upcoming events that feature fresh seafood.

“Together, these initiatives have the power to strengthen the oyster economy in St. Mary’s County,” said Liz Mildenstein, Executive Director of Visit St. Mary’s MD. “Our local watermen and women are known for their deep connection to the Chesapeake Bay and its surrounding waters, with many carrying generations of experience in tonging, dredging, and shucking. We want to give visitors the opportunity to connect with this important part of our culture and meet the people and experience the food that have helped sustain our community for generations.”

Information about the Oyster Trail, documentary, and blog are available now at <https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/blog/oysters/>