

STUDENT FACT SHEET

A Timeline of Oyster and Blue Crab Turning Points

Directions: Using the data below, plot each date as a point on the appropriate graph (Blue Crab or Oyster Harvests). Write the capitalized key words beside each point. Note: You will need these events to complete the student worksheet “Graphing the Oyster and Blue Crab Harvests.”

OYSTER EVENTS

- 1882 BROOKS PREDICTION:** Biologist W.K. Brooks predicts the Bay’s oyster beds will eventually be depleted and proposes farming oysters to increase the resource.
- 1887 PATENT TONGS:** Invention of Patent Tongs allows watermen to catch oysters in water too deep for hand tongs. This opens up new oyster grounds.
- 1890 CULL LAW:** Maryland passes the “Cull Law” – a conservation measure making the minimum size for oysters 2.5 inches. Smaller oysters must be thrown back into the Bay.
- 1906 HAMAN ACT:** Maryland passes Haman Oyster Culture Act to encourage private “farming” of oysters. It has little effect.
- 1925 TYPHOID OUTBREAK:** Typhoid outbreak blamed on oysters; Americans reluctant to eat them.
- 1960 FARMING PROGRAM:** Maryland begins a large oyster farming program that continues till 1970.
- 1972 HURRICANE AGNES:** Storm dumps silt into the Bay and destroys oyster bars.
- 1980s DISEASES-MSX/DERMO:** Oyster-killing diseases (MSX and Dermo) become chronic.
- 2003 EXOTIC OYSTERS:** Maryland and Virginia debate whether to plant Asian oysters in the Bay.

BLUE CRAB EVENTS

- 1900 FIRST CANNERY:** Maryland’s first crab cannery opens.
- 1916 SIZE LIMITS:** Maryland passes first laws to protect crab population. Laws limit size of crabs caught, outlaw harvesting of sponge crabs, and establish crabbing season length.
- 1943 CRAB POTS LEGALIZED:** Crab pots (invented in 1928) legalized in Maryland.
- 1950s CRAB FEASTS:** Crab feasts become popular social tradition in the Chesapeake region.
- 1960s LIMITS REMOVED:** Maryland removes limits on how many crab pots a waterman can set.
- 1972 HURRICANE AGNES:** Storm strikes and destroys underwater grasses, habitat for blue crabs.
- 1985 DROUGHT:** Drought hits Chesapeake region. Little rainfall results in high salinity in Bay waters.
- 1994 LIMITS AGAIN:** Maryland places limits on days watermen can crab and number of crab pots.