

interest in seafood and things related to seafood. And so, long before I was elected I was resolved that if I ever became Governor I would do as much as possible to improve the industry in my State.

I have been asked to speak to you today on the future of the seafood industry in Maryland. In pondering the future of the seafood industry, it is well to remember the old adage about a prophet being without honor. This is true, in particular, when we consider the uncertainties of this particular industry. For in the seafood industry, there are so many imponderables and unforeseeable forces that, despite all the precautions we may take, any one effort we may make to build constructively may prove to be futile. What we can, and must, do is to assess the facts at hand, and, using them as a background, take action and pray for the best.

The history of the shellfish industry in Maryland and Virginia, as we know it from the records, goes back 140 years or more. Huge piles of shells found on our shore lines indicate that long before that oysters comprised a substantial part of the food supply of the American Indian population. As early as 1825, oysters were taken from the Chesapeake Bay to New England to be planted along the southern coast of that region. In fact, it may be stated that oysters from Maryland and Virginia, schooner load after schooner load plying their way from our waters northward, replenished the beds of Rhode Island and Connecticut. It is said, also, that the industry in Delaware owes much to brood stock from the Chesapeake.

The Chesapeake Bay has achieved a reputation for being the richest oyster producing body of water in the world. So far as I know, no facts have yet been produced to refute that statement.

Available records of the period indicate that in the 1880's the production of oysters reached an annual total of 12 to 15 million bushels. Sadly—and almost inexplicably—the total production in Maryland last year declined to the lowest point in history—less than 2 million bushels.

We have here in Maryland witnessed a gradual decline in the production of oysters. This pathetic decimation of a resource so important to the economic life of our State was apparent to everyone. And yet, no successful solution has been found to halt it.

What then, are the reasons for this decline? Why should a great economic resource, comprising one of the most nutritious of our foods, become so depleted? What can we do to halt the impoverishment and restore the productivity of our oyster bottoms?