

# SUPPORT FOR MARICULTURE AMONG RESIDENTS AND TOURISTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA AND FLORIDA COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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Marine aquaculture, or mariculture, and tourism are important economic diversification strategies in coastal fishing communities facing the decline of wild-capture fisheries. While tourism is thriving in many coastal areas of the United States, growth of mariculture has been limited partly due to negative media. In Florida (FL) and South Carolina (SC), mariculture of hard clams (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) and oysters (*Crassostrea virginica*) was introduced to help communities recover from regulatory and market constraints to other fisheries. This research examined whether knowledge, awareness, and beliefs about mariculture techniques and the seafood it produces influence tourist and resident support of mariculture. The study occurred in six communities (3 in South Carolina and 3 in Florida) profiled as fishing communities by NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service and representing varying levels of tourism development and investment in mariculture.

Tourists and resident surveys (n=635 and 713, respectively), administered via email, focused on: awareness that mariculture was occurring in the community and level of support for it, self-assessed knowledge about mariculture, positive and negative beliefs about the benefits and impacts of mariculture, and beliefs about quality of farmed versus wild-caught seafood (Table 1). Resident knowledge was significantly higher for tourists, with 63.0% of residents and 44.0% of tourists aware of mariculture operating in the community. The (OLS) regression model for tourists was significant and explained 33.4% of the variability in support for mariculture. The resident model was significant and explained 59.8% of the variability in support for mariculture. In both models, positive beliefs about mariculture were the best predictor of support followed by knowledge of marine farming. Interestingly, negative beliefs about mariculture and quality of farmed seafood were not significant predictors in the tourist model and awareness was not a significant predictor of support by residents.

Table 1. Summary of linear regression analyses for variables predicting support for mariculture.

Variable <sup>1</sup>	Tourists			Residents		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>Beta</i>
(Constant)	1.433	0.159		1.174	0.122	
Knowledge	0.143	0.035	0.182***	0.109	0.021	0.173***
Awareness	0.142	0.052	0.118**	0.024	0.039	0.020
Belief (pos)	0.459	0.051	0.436***	0.628	0.033	0.634***
Beliefs (neg)	-0.036	0.036	-0.041	- 0.124	0.024	-0.145***
Quality	0.061	0.040	0.070	0.068	0.027	0.079**
R <sup>2</sup>		0.342			0.602	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.334			0.598	
F		44.359***			157.508**	

<sup>1</sup>All variables are composite means for multi-item scales except Awareness which is dummy coded (0=No, 1=Yes); \*\*Significant at p<0.01; \*\*\*Significant at p<0.001