

Species Profile: The Southern Quahog, *Mercenaria campechiensis*

Range and Habitat

Range:	New Jersey to Florida and Gulf of Mexico
Salinity:	>30 psu
Depth:	Intertidal to 36 m
Habitat:	Sandy bottoms; seagrass beds in estuaries
Size:	98-110 mm; up to 164 mm



Commercial Importance

Some recreational harvest occurs on both coasts. The former commercial fishery in the Indian River has been replaced by aquaculture. Most commercial production of hard clams (aquaculture) relies on the northern quahog, *Mercenaria mercenaria*. At the present time there is no aquaculture production of the southern quahog.

Ecological Importance

As suspension feeding infauna, southern quahogs graze primary production (phytoplankton), transfer carbon and nitrogen to benthic food chains and sediments. Growth and survival of clams is greater in seagrass beds than in adjacent sandy areas. There is evidence to suggest that quahogs actually enhance seagrass productivity by increasing water clarity, allowing more light to reach the bottom.

Role in Environmental Restoration

Our hypothesis is that on the west coast of Florida, the indigenous southern quahog can be utilized to increase water quality of coastal habitats by increasing water clarity (removing primary production) and transferring nutrients from the water column to the sediments, both of which will promote seagrass growth.



The Gulf Shellfish Institute offers the following capabilities to any group interested in restoration projects involving clams:

- Production of juvenile (4 mm seed) clams in commercial hatcheries
- Seed grown on commercial leases (state-owned submerged land) until desired size (up to 60 mm) is attained
- Planting seed at desired density
- Follow-up monitoring of clam growth and survival, sea grass growth, and environmental parameters (sediment and water quality)