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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“TOTTEN INLET VIRGINICA” FROM PUGET SOUND JUDGED BEST TASTING OYSTER AT EAST COAST SHELLFISH GROWER’S ASSN. FIRST ANNUAL INVITATIONAL OYSTER CHALLENGE IN R.I.

PROVIDENCE. R.I.: “Oyster growers are fiercely fiercely competitive and every grower is convinced their oyster is the best’, says Bob Rheault, President of the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association. To settle the issue of which East Coast oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) tastes best, the ECSGA and the National Shellfisheries Association asked growers to submit their finest to the First Annual Invitational Oyster Challenge, held in Provincetown, Rhode Island April 7 where 19 varieties from three coasts went head to head in a blind tasting judged by a celebrity panel of some of the country’s most discriminating oyster palates.

While the oysters were judged on a number of characteristics and the Island Creek from Duxbury, Massachusetts came in first overall, when it came to taste, it was an oyster from Washington state, the Totten Inlet Virginia, that prevailed. “Some of our customers have been telling us we have the best tasting oyster”, says Taylor Shellfish Farms President Bill Taylor, “but we are thrilled to have it verified like this by such an esteemed tasting panel.”

“I’d always known they were good, but tasting blind against so many others was really eye-opening” enthused Rowan Jacobsen, one of the Challenge celebrity judges and author of *The Geography of Oysters*. “You don’t usually see all of that fruitiness and body in a virginica. To me, the superiority of the Totten’s flavor was stunning.”

“Plump and juicy, with a crisp flavor and a good amount of brine, it is a real oyster lover’s oyster”, says judge Sandy Ingber, Executive Chef of the New York’s legendary Grand Central Oyster Bar. “It is one of our top-selling oysters; I sell 2300 a week.”

Because flavor characteristics are derived from the waters they grow in, oysters on the half shell are traditionally marketed by the name of their growing location. Most restaurants serving oysters carry several varieties; some as many as 30. All of the oysters were sent to Brown University where they will be tested for salts, minerals and metals. “I’m really trying to understand why some oysters taste rich and full bodied while others have a thin finish dominated by salt”, says Rheault who also grows Moonstone oysters in Narragansett, RI.

Totten Inlet Virginicas get their start in Taylor’s Quilcene, WA hatchery from brood stock descended from Eastern oysters brought to Washington State from the East Coast by train nearly a century ago. When thumbnail-sized, they are placed in nutrient-rich Totten Inlet in South Puget Sound where it takes 2 to 4 years to reach Taylor’s 3 ¼ inch minimum size “when they just taste better”, says Taylor.

Detailed information on the oysters, the judges and the judging can be found at ECSGA.org or by contacting Bob Rheault 401-783-1360 bob@moonstoneoysters.com. For information on Taylor Shellfish Farms visit www.taylorshellfish.com.

THE OYSTERS (alphabetically):

13 Mile Brand – Apalachicola Bay, FL.
Camanada Bay Oysters – Camanada Bay, LA.
Cape May Salts – Delaware Bay, NJ.
Island Creek Oysters® – Duxbury Bay, MA.
Katama Bay Oysters – Martha's Vineyard, MA.
Matunuck Oysters – Potters Pond, Wakefield, RI.,
May River Select – Bluffton, SC.
Moonstone Oysters® – Narragansett, RI.
Mystic Oysters – Mystic CT.
New Point "Comforts"® – New Point, VA.
Ninigret Cups – Charlestown Pond, RI.
Pemaquid Oysters® – Damariscotta River, ME.
Rappahannock River Oysters™ – Rappahannock River, VA.
Saddle Rocks® – Long Island Sound, NY.
Snow Hill Oysters – Chincoteague Bay, MD.
Sweet Petites – Katama Bay, Martha's Vineyard, MA.
Toby Island Bay Oysters – Chincoteague Bay, VA.
Totten Inlet Virgincas – Totten Inlet, WA.
Watch Hill Oyster® – Winnapaug Pond, RI.

THE JUDGES:

Mallory Bufford, Executive Chef, Black's Bar & Kitchen, Bethesda, MD
David Carrier, Chef/Owner, Avenue Sea Restaurant, Apalachicola, FL.
Kurt Freisland, Buyer, J. J. McDonalds, Jessup, MD
Max Harvey, Seafood Buyer, Jasper White's Summer Shack, Boston
Peter Hoffman, Chef/Owner, Savoy Restaurant and Back Forty, New York
Sandy Ingber, Executive Chef, Grand Central Oyster Bar, New York
Rowan Jacobsen, author, *The Geography of Oysters*
Rob Klink, Executive Chef, Oceanaire Seafood Room, Baltimore, MD
Maureen Pothier, College of the Culinary Arts, Johnson & Wales University
Bruce Sherman, Chef/Partner, North Pond Restaurant, Chicago