

Prisoners help restock waters with spat at Piney Point Aquaculture Center | [View Clip](#)
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Inmates, oysters get second chance

Inmates from the Southern Maryland Pre-Release Center in Charlotte Hall load bags of shells seeded with oyster spat onto a boat for distribution in St. Catherine's Sound off the Wicomico River.

Stanley Tomaszewski, manager of the Piney Point Aquaculture Center, surveys the large, concrete tanks that his staff is using to grow baby oysters for distribution in the Wicomico River and its tributaries.

Baby oysters are once again flowing out of the Piney Point Aquaculture Center and into local streams this month with a big hand from the St. Mary's County Waterman's Association and local inmates.

The young oysters, called spat, have been growing slowly in large, concrete tanks at the center. On Tuesday, inmates from the Southern Maryland Pre-Release Unit in Charlotte Hall showed up at the dawn to load them onto watermen's boats for distribution in St. Catherine's Sound off the Wicomico River.

According to Stanley Tomaszewski, manager of the aquaculture facility, the inmates began pulling the spat out of the growth tanks at 5:30 a.m. in order to get them on the boats and out on the river before the rising sun overheated them.

At first sight, the loads of spat appear to be just bags of oyster shells. Tomaszewski points out that each shell has several new calcified bumps on them — quarter-sized oyster spat. He estimated that the inmates and watermen shipped 3 million little spat on Tuesday. The facility has already produced 15 million spat this season, he estimates.

The facility will continue to produce spat as long as it can get supplies of oyster larvae from the University of Maryland's Horn Point Laboratory in Cambridge, hopefully throughout the rest of September.

This is the first time in four years that the Piney Point facility has produced oyster spat. The 30-year-old facility has been focused on growing eel grasses for the last four years, but a new funding initiative by the governor's office has changed their priorities once again, at least for the next three years.

Now, the facility's tanks are piled high with bags of spat-laden shells and cycle a mixture of creek water, algae and other nutrients through the stacks of budding bivalves.

"We're the dirty end of real science," Tomaszewski said. "This is not lab work."

And truly dirty work it is. Clinton Davis of Waldorf, one of the inmates loading the oyster spat onto the boats, was covered in mud by the time the crew loaded the last pallet onto the oyster boat Frisky, but he was smiling.

"It's a good way to get back into the community," said Davis, who said he has spent the last 22 years behind bars for robbery and handgun convictions.

Oscar Tyer of Avenue has only served a year for his drug possession conviction, but he has completed a boot camp program, a drug program and several work programs like the oyster cultivation job in hopes of having his sentence suspended. "This has taught me a valuable

lesson," Tyler said of his incarceration. He said he hopes to get back to his daughter and his construction job as soon as the court will let him.

While the inmates reconstruct their lives, Tucker Brown, treasurer of the St. Mary's County Waterman's Association, hopes to reconstruct the local oyster reefs.

"We just have to build it back now," Brown said. "It's going to take time, and it's going to be costly."

With the inmates finished loading his boat, Brown jumped aboard the Frisky and steered her out to the Potomac River.