



MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
FISHING AND BOATING SERVICES
AQUACULTURE AND INDUSTRY ENHANCEMENT DIVISION

FARM-RAISED SHELLFISH TAGGING FACT SHEET

- ☐ The tagging program assures that the State of Maryland is in compliance with the federal requirements of the Food and Drug Administration's National Shellfish Sanitation Program by providing identification and traceability of shellfish harvested from shellfish aquaculture leases and the public fishery.
- ☐ Tagging regulations require anyone harvesting shellfish from a lease to complete and affix a Farm-Raised Shellfish tag to **each** container of shellfish, or shellfish stored in bulk, before leaving the leased area from which the shellfish are harvested.
- ☐ In 2014, the department adopted regulations to allow harvesters that are also certified by the Maryland Department of Health to utilize a dealer tag that meets the requirements stipulated in the National Shellfish Sanitation Program Model Ordinance, in lieu of a department-issued harvester tag.
- ☐ Shellfish tagging is the industry standard nationwide. Keeping our state in compliance with the tagging program guidelines builds consumer confidence that Maryland shellfish are safe, certified, and healthy.
- ☐ Tags must remain affixed to the containers until the product is in the possession of a Department of Health certified shellfish dealer.
- ☐ Farm-Raised Shellfish tags are issued to leaseholders by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and may not be transferred or reused. Because they are not dated, tags obtained in prior years may be used in 2025. Prior to any harvest activity in 2025, leaseholders should ensure that they have a sufficient supply of tags on hand. A leaseholder in good standing may obtain additional tags as needed by contacting Kellie Dennis at Kellie.Dennis@maryland.gov.
- ☐ **A harvester may not be in possession of wild shellfish tags and farm-raised shellfish tags on a harvesting vessel at the same time.**
- ☐ Failure to comply with the state's tagging requirements can result in civil and/or criminal penalties, including the suspension or revocation of a leaseholder's Shellfish Aquaculture Harvester Permit and/or Registration Cards associated with the lease.



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FISHING AND BOATING SERVICES

BULK TAGGING OF FARM-RAISED SHELLFISH IN MARYLAND
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In accordance with the National Shellfish Sanitation Program Model Ordinance, the department has promulgated regulations to allow the use of bulk harvester tags for a single lot of oysters. The regulations, COMAR 08.02.23.04(I), became effective April 1, 2024. The new tagging program allows an individual harvesting from a single lease in a single trip on a single day to use a department-issued bulk tag. The bulk tags include additional information that make it unique from an individual tag.

While the use of a bulk tag provides flexibility to harvesters working a single shellfish lease on a single day and selling to a single dealer, it is not meant to replace individual tagging for all other circumstances. You are not required to bulk tag and individual tags provide significantly more flexibility in where you can harvest and sell your product. We recommend that, when in doubt, use traditional individual tags.

Is bulk tagging required? Can I still use individual tags?

No, bulk tagging is not required. You may continue to use individual tags on each container as currently permitted. Some harvesters or dealers will prefer to continue to individual tag for a variety of reasons. If you choose to bulk tag, you must use a department-issued tag unless you are licensed and certified as a dealer by both the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Health.

When do I start using a department-issued bulk tag?

If you choose to bulk tag, you must begin using the department issued bulk tag by November 1, 2024. Note: after this date you will **no longer** be able to modify individual tags.

When will tags be available and how do I obtain bulk tags?

Department issued bulk tags are now available for pick-up from the Tawes State Office Building by appointment only. Alternatively, you may pick up tags at a tag distribution event or from a staff member during a routine inspection.

Can I harvest from more than one lease in a trip and use a bulk tag?

No, you may only use a bulk tag if harvesting from one lease. If you plan to harvest from multiple leases in one trip or are not sure when you head out, you should use individual tags. After you have landed all product from the first trip, you may make a second trip to a different lease and utilize a bulk tag for that trip..

Where do I put my tag?

If multiple containers, ex. bushel baskets, are being used, attach the tag to one of the containers in the lot. If a larger unit, such as a tote is being used, the unit should be tagged. It is the harvesters responsibility to ensure that the tag remains affixed and all containers in a lot stay physically together during transportation until the product is delivered to a dealer that is licensed and certified by both the Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Health on the day of harvest. Note: The department is working to clarify this in regulation and will send additional guidance once available.



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I also hold a TFL/oyster harvester license and I only have wild shellfish tags on board. May I modify them and use instead of a farm-raised tag?

No, an individual may not have both farm-raised and wild tags **or** individual and bulk tags on board at the same time. All farm-raised tags are printed in red ink to help differentiate from wild shellfish tags.

I only have individual tags on board. May I modify an individual tag to be utilized as a bulk tag.

No, the department allowed for this as an interim solution while bulk tags were being printed. However, as of November 1, 2024, this is no longer allowed and harvesters must obtain bulk tags from the department.

Can I reuse a tag?

No, harvester tags should never be reused, regardless of if they are bulk or individual.

May I use a bulk tag if I intend to sell my product to multiple dealers?

No, the lot of shellfish may be sold only to one certified dealer. If you intend to sell to multiple dealers, you must individually tag the product accordingly.

Note: this document is for farm-raised products only. Please refer to the Bulk Tagging of Wild Caught Shellfish FAQ document if you are commercially harvesting during the wild oyster season in Maryland.

To obtain **Farm Raised Shellfish BULK tags**, please contact Kellie Dennis at 410-260-8652 or kellie.dennis@maryland.gov

If you have additional questions about bulk tagging farm-raised shellfish please contact Katie Busch at 443-569-9069 or kathryne.busch@maryland.gov