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## **Ventura Shellfish Enterprise Announces Public Workshop on Feb. 16 *Federal Grant Helps Ventura Meet Growing Need for Aquaculture***

VENTURA, Calif. -- *The Ventura Shellfish Enterprise (VSE), a collaborative group seeking to grow sustainably-cultivated mussels in the Santa Barbara Channel near Ventura, will hold the first of a series of public information workshops at 7 p.m. on February 16, 2017.* The workshop, in coordination with the Ventura Port District, will provide an introduction to the benefits of shellfish aquaculture; how this crop is grown worldwide; and the specifics of this exciting new project proposed for Ventura.

*The workshop is free and open to the public. No RSVP is required. It will be held at the Channel Islands National Park Visitors Center, 1901 Spinnaker Drive, in the Ventura Harbor.* Attendees may sign up at [venturashellfishenterprise.com](http://venturashellfishenterprise.com) (click on the "Get Involved" link) or email [info@venturashellfish.org](mailto:info@venturashellfish.org) to be added to the mailing list or register for a workshop.

Supported by a \$300,000 grant to the Ventura Port District from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) through the National Sea Grant College Program, it is anticipated that the Ventura Port District, as a member of VSE, will obtain all the permits and entitlements needed to cultivate mussels on leases that will be farmed by commercial fisherman and landed at existing fish off-loading facilities in the Ventura Harbor.

The project has generated considerable interest in the harbor community. “The aquaculture effort will bolster commercial fishing activity in the harbor and stimulate the local economy,” said Ventura Port District General Manager Oscar Peña.

Doug Bush, a VSE partner and general manager of The Cultured Abalone Farm in Goleta, said state waters off Ventura are an ideal location for the commercial bivalve shellfish operations. “There simply is no reason for California to consume imported shellfish when we can enjoy it fresh and locally produced, and be confident that it is grown using sustainable and responsible practices,” he said.

As part of the grant, Coastal Marine Biolabs, a nonprofit research-based science education organization with facilities in the Ventura Harbor and a local leader in science education, will lead a comprehensive public outreach campaign to inform commercial fishermen, consumers, Ventura residents and the public at large of the project’s features, benefits and impacts. “Our outreach efforts are aimed at promoting honest and productive dialog with various stakeholders on the wide range of environmental, economic, scientific, and practical considerations that converge on a transformative project of this kind and scale,” said Linda Santschi, CMB’s Scientific Director.

Other volunteer VSE partners include: Ashworth Leininger Group, a local environmental consulting firm; and California Sea Grant, a university-based program funded by NOAA and located at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Teaming with VSE are experts from federal and state agencies, universities and commercial shellfish operations.

Global demand for seafood is expected to grow while harvests from capture fisheries remain stable. Experts are looking to domestic aquaculture production to promote economic opportunities and provide a sustainable source of domestic seafood.

“Supporting these partnerships to increase domestically farmed seafood for American consumers is a high priority for NOAA’s Office of Aquaculture and the National Sea Grant Program,” said Paul Olin, an Aquaculture Specialist with California Sea Grant.

“The grant, combined with our unique project team, provides pivotal support to launch this exciting project,” said Everard Ashworth, a principal with Ashworth Leininger Group and chair of the Ventura Port District. “Government entitlements are the single highest hurdle to sustainable seafood cultivation, as evidenced by the paucity of permitted open water shellfish growing sites offshore of California.”

“The VSE project will provide a very helpful permit template that can be applied throughout California to help increase shellfish production and a sustainably-raised domestic food supply,” said Randy Lovell, State Aquaculture Coordinator with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

“Aquaculture is an important component of NOAA’s efforts to maintain healthy and productive marine and coastal ecosystems,” added Diane Windham, NOAA’s California Aquaculture Coordinator and a member of the VSE leadership team.

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