

Title: **Acceptance of Sunray Venus Clams as a New Aquaculture Product in Florida**

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Abstract: Molluscan shellfish culture is an important component of the commercial aquaculture industry in Florida, USA. The primary species cultured is the hard clam, *Mercenaria mercenaria*. Currently, annual grower revenues total approximately \$15 million, which generate \$40 million in economic impact to the state. However, hard clam production in other USA regions provides significant competition, resulting in downward pressure on price and reduced market share. Growers are currently examining alternative species in order to reduce production and market risk associated with the sole production of hard clams. The University of Florida is assessing the feasibility of culturing sunray venus clams, *Macrocallista nimbosa*. Initial efforts demonstrate the culture feasibility of producing sunray venus clams on existing hard clam lease sites. Market feasibility will be considered next. Sunray venus clams will be provided in shellstock form to local full-service seafood restaurants, while local sushi restaurants will receive only the cleaned foot meat. Chefs and consumers will be surveyed concerning the acceptance of sunray venus clams as a menu or food item. Chef respondents will be asked to rate sunray venus clams in terms of ease in preparation, flexibility in preparation, acceptable unit cost, product form preference, product quality, etc. Consumers will be asked to assess sunray venus clams in terms of flavor, texture, preferred method of preparation, willingness to pay, perception of cultured product, etc. The findings will help existing hard clam growers to better determine if diversification into sunray venus clam culture is a sound business decision.