Deborah Keller, OysterMom

Tallahassee, Florida

Tell us a bit about your career. How did you get into the work you do, and what are you doing currently?

I worked to launch the in-water-column oyster aquaculture industry in Florida and became one of the first oyster farmers starting in 2016. I farmed 1.5 acres while working for the Nature Conservancy (TNC), then retired from TNC and became a full-time farmer, producer, shellfish processor, marketer, and caterer of Oyster Raw Bars. I am currently transitioning out of full-time farmer and continuing on to the processor, marketer, and caterer side of the business.

What does responsible seafood mean to you? How does that fit into your business?

Sustainable production of shellfish is very important to me and the future of our bays. It was one of two reasons I engaged in the industry. The second reason was to revive the local shellfish industry producing a network of jobs and incomes for many. Third was to produce a great-tasting oyster! Nothing beats an Apalachicola area oyster.

What’s the most important thing your customers should know about the seafood they’re eating?

It is sustainably grown and safe to consume.

Why is it important to you to take time out of your busy schedule to share your story and raise awareness about seafood responsibility?

I have advocated for oysters in the water and the shellfish aquaculture industry since I jumped into it. Most people just don't have a clue. I frequently promote the local oyster industry and the value of oysters to our ecosystem.
What does the future of seafood look like to you?

Frankly, I am concerned. Climate change, the potential for relaxed environmental protections of our waters, and over-harvesting of wild stocks are daunting. Without careful management, things could go downhill quickly.

What is your favorite seafood preparation?

One of my oysters on the grill until it just begins to open, then shucked into a bowl of melted butter with fresh garlic. Served right then and there, with a cold beer on the side. Pure heaven.