

Pearl Production A Painstaking Process

Financial Gossip

By WILLIAM D. LAFFLER
UPI Financial Editor

NEW YORK (UPI) — There are more than 5,000 kinds of oysters, but only one type is considered ideal for production of cultured pearls.

Most of these pearl-producing oysters are found off the coast of Japan, which furnishes all of the cultured pearls used in the world.

"There are thousands of oyster farms in Japan," Sidney A. Weiss, president of Imperial Pearl Syndicate, Inc., which is headquartered in Chicago and has an office in Tokyo, said in an interview. "They send the pearls to a central area and we inspect them for size and iridescence."

Weiss said that production of cultured pearls is a painstaking process that requires patience.

"An oyster has to be at least two years old before a nucleus can be inserted into it," Weiss said. "The nucleus is the seed of the pearl. But it takes an oyster at least two years to produce a pearl from the nucleus."

Oddly, the nucleus is taken from the mother-of-pearl of a clam that lives in Mississippi River waters. Weiss said teenage Japanese girls, whose thin and delicate hands are adept at making incisions in oysters, are in demand for these services.

"The oysters are put in shaped pearl that is practically useless. But some oysters can manufacture two or three pearls."

Once the oyster produces a pearl, it is sent to a center where it is inspected. Skilled craftsmen know exactly how to bore holes through the pearls which are needed for necklaces. Some pearls are used for brooches, costume jewelry and rings.

"All pearls are not white," Weiss said. "Some of them are yellow. But we have a big mar-

ket for yellow pearls in Brazil. They don't want any other kind in Brazil."

Weiss said one of the big myths about oysters concerns reports that diners in restaurants find them in half shells.

"Oysters which produce shells are inedible," Weiss said. "Anyone who thinks he has found a pearl in an oyster in a restaurant has found something else. It couldn't be a pearl."

Ella Mentry

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