News

UConn startup innovates with oyster supply



Keegan Jalbert, founder of AccessFlora and the Innovation Quest winner in 2025. Jalbert said he hopes to win $30,000 with oyster samples grown in purified water at the Wolff New Venture Competition on Tuesday, Oct. 13. PHOTO COURTESY OF UCONN TODAY

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University of Connecticut startup AccessFlora is hoping to win $30,000 with oyster samples grown in purified water at the Wolff New Venture Competition on Tuesday, Oct. 13.

The founder of the company, Keegan Jalbert, said the idea originally came from research that he's been doing for about three years as a graduate student in the Department of Nutritional Sciences.

"We cultivate this microorganism that produces Omega 3 and the original use case that this was intended for was baby formula," Jalbert said about the research that inspired him to create AccessFlora. "Through some experiments and talking with people we found that it has a pretty valuable use in aquaculture as well."

Aquaculture refers to the farming of species that live in oceans and estuaries like shellfish, algae and — in the case of AccessFlora — oysters, according to the National Ocean Service.

Omega 3, Jalbert said, is a fatty acid and "more people are becoming aware that it is important in your health for your brain and eye development."

AccessFlora was created when Jalbert realized he could use these microorganisms to create a new kind of system in which his startup has greater involvement in how the oysters grow. He said this would help ensure the quality of the oysters his startup sells.

"The water quality that you're raising your oyster in is ultimately what your product is," Jalbert said. "So we are controlling the water quality and feed that goes into it, and because of that we have control over the oyster itself."

Jalbert said he has good relationships with other oyster farmers and regulatory bodies as the founder of AccessFlora, but added that oyster supply is a "tricky subject."

One example of oyster supply challenges was the recent nor'easter that hit the United States' East Coast last weekend. He said oyster harvests dwindled after the runoff from the rain risked the local water quality of the area.

The main distinguishing factor Jalbert saw between AccessFlora and other methods of harvesting oysters was the startup's ability to withstand those water quality issues.

"The current practices are super sustainable. They're safe, they're healthy, they're good products, but there is no control," Jalbert said about current aquaculture methods.

The oysters aren't available for commercial sale yet, but samples began shipping to chefs, restaurant buyers and distributors this month, according to the startup's website.

Jalbert said he expected any startup like AccessFlora to take a few years before becoming profitable but added that winning a prize at the startup competition could help dampen some of the rising costs in shipping and production.

"That would be life changing, and it would be extremely impactful for the business," Jalbert said about the $40,000 grand prize.

The Wolff New Venture Competition is hosted by UConn's Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, according to the event registration page. It gives away $150,000 in funding to startups annually. There are over 30 startups expected at this competition.

Jalbert said that if he wins, he'd spend the $40,000 to focus on AccessFlora's current goals in the oyster business, but he eventually hopes to apply the Omega 3-producing microorganisms to broader food groups like different milk and vegan products.



Oysters are small mollusks, typically growing three to five inches long, but they play a large role in marine ecosystems and coastal economies. Keegan Jalbert, founder of University of Connecticut startup AccessFlora, said he hopes to win $30,000 with oyster samples grown in purified water

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