

Food For Thought

TIPS ON TASTE NUTRITION & HEALTH

Belly Up To The Raw Bar

by Sara Ann Harris,

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(NAPSA)—Louisiana's discovered yet another way to indulge in the delicate, savory, raw oyster. The preparation promises to be both wholesome and delectable. Health scientists say the magic in the new method is all about timing.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "about 20 million Americans eat raw oysters. While not a threat to most healthy people, for some people eating raw oysters can cause serious illness or even death." That group of at-risk oyster lovers should know who they are: diners with liver disease, diabetes, cancer, immune deficiencies, and other chronic ailments. The risk is associated with *Vibrio vulnificus*, a bacteria that occurs nationally in seawater during summer months.

As the nation's leading producer of oysters, Louisiana takes this risk seriously. According to Louisiana Oyster Task Force Chair Mike Voisin, "We've made it a priority to come up with alternatives for the at-risk population who want to eat raw oysters."

Dr. Marilyn Barrios Kilgen, National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (1994-99), tested the premise that marinating oysters could render them *V. vulnificus* free. Funded by the National College Sea Grant Program, "the year-long study of intensive microbiological testing established that a 24-hour marinade effectively reduces levels of *V. vulnificus* to nondetectable," said Dr. Kilgen. The study was quite a success.

The key was the acid base of the marinade, i.e., the lemon juice or



vinegar. "Actually, we already knew that *V. vulnificus* was acid sensitive," said Dr. Kilgen. "The real question was how much time it would take the acid to penetrate to the center of the oysters." The researcher's caveat is that no microbiologist can state definitively that raw protein, even ceviche, is absolutely 100 percent risk free.

Louisiana chefs from the famous John Folse Culinary Institute, Kenneth Perry and Carol Gunter, created marinades representing six regions of the country for the study: South Louisiana with a horseradish taste, the Midwest with apple/smoked flavors, the Southwest with hot peppers, the Pacific Rim with a soy sauce/ginger blend, Hawaii with a pineapple flavor, and the Caribbean with a papaya/mango blend. It hasn't yet been determined when these marinades will go commercial.

Nonetheless, consumers are invited to belly up to the bar for a round of wholesome, delicious, marinated oysters. The Louisiana Seafood Board Recipe Hotline is offering a tried and true *V. vulnificus*-zapping marinade, a recipe graciously provided by Dr. Kilgen herself. For a copy, call 1-800-222-4017. For other seafood recipes visit louisianaseafood.com or louisianaoysters.org.