Among the many things that the state of Georgia has to be proud of, our abundant coast and seafood is certainly one of them. Georgia Southern Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Jennifer Sweeney Tookes, has received research funding to help oyster farmers in Georgia develop aquaculture methods for their oyster production.

The goals of this project are to work with Georgia oyster farmers to develop sustainable oyster farming methods of single oysters through aquaculture to increase production; to identify safe and successful means of distribution directly to the restaurants throughout the state; and to create culturally appropriate marketing tools and communication channels between oyster farmers and restaurants to ensure the high value of these single oysters is conveyed.

In 2013, Georgia produced 23,998 pounds of oyster meats valued at $114,929 from approximately 52,000 acres of approved shellfish growing area. This low volume harvest is a result of the fact that Georgia's oyster industry is built upon wild harvest strategies of clustered oysters where harvest is conducted by hand and is not cost effective.

Since oysters take on the flavor of the water in which they are grown, Tookes' work will help to improve the quality of oysters produced on Georgia's coast. "I enjoy working with Georgia's coastal fishing industry and am excited that this project may provide a new income stream for existing shellfish businesses," said Tookes. "I also know that there are many excellent restaurants in Georgia that will love to have access to a new, premium type of oyster that is produced in our own state. This project is an excellent example of how sustainable local aquaculture can fulfill local food needs."