



Project Pond

From aquaculture and watering livestock to fishing and recreation, farm ponds can be practical, enjoyable and profitable.

Photo by Larry Javorsky What is a farm pond? Most of us imagine a tranquil body of blue water glistening in the sunlight with lunker bass swimming lazily beneath the surface while children cavort happily on a homemade raft.

But is this fantasy really why people build farm ponds?

The old-fashioned reasons for building a farm pond include irrigation, drinking water, erosion control and fire preparedness.

But times have changed for farmers, and so have the reasons for building ponds. Fire, irrigation, livestock watering and boats notwithstanding, the number-one reason farmers build ponds these days is that they want to raise fish.

Aquaculture is a legitimate business—and as thousands of farmers are discovering, there are plenty of crops that can be raised in or around ponds.

Farmers are known for being a practical lot, and most all small farmers who do own a pond would be interested in adding to the financial well being of the farm business.

Photo by Larry Javorsky

In that light, we've taken a brief tour of some of the many possibilities that exist for making use of a farm pond. While managing ponds for multiple use is difficult, in some cases the lunker bass and children on rafts might still fit into the equation.

Ponds Provide Water for Livestock

As every farmer knows, clean drinking water and quality forage are required to produce healthy livestock. For some farmers, ponds serve as reservoirs for animal drinking water.

When constructing a livestock pond, consider that most are entirely fenced. Fencing prevents animals from grazing stabilizing vegetation on the pond banks, dam and spillway, and thereby reduces erosion and sediment in the water. In order to water livestock, water from the fenced pond goes through a drainpipe and is gravity-fed to a stockwater tank on the property.

If a pond is constructed on flat land, a gravity-fed system may not be practical. Instead, these ponds can be partially fenced to allow only limited livestock access along one or two bank areas. In many instances the fence extends out into the pond basin, but doesn't permit extensive wading by large numbers of animals.

In some situations, fencing a pond is not practical due to herd size, cost and maintenance. However, whenever possible, fence the pond's most vulnerable areas (such as the dam and spillway).

The amount of water needed depends on the type of livestock you raise. For example, a dairy cow or horse each need approximately 15 gallons of water per day; sheep need 2 gallons; hogs need 4.

Water that is polluted from untreated sewage, pesticides and other chemicals, manure and urine leads to poor animal health and livestock losses. Contact your county extension agent or state water agency to arrange testing if poor water quality is suspected.

Fish-Out Operations Offer Fishing for a Fee

A good-looking pond tends to attract the attention of anglers: Some fishermen ask permission to fish on the pond, while others will sneak onto the property when they think nobody is looking.

Photo by Larry Javorsky A crafty farmer can take advantage of the situation by operating a commercial fishing operation on the pond, thereby turning the aquatic charisma into a source of income.



Fish-out operations are those in which customers pay an entry fee to fish well-stocked ponds. The customers also pay additional fees based on how many fish they catch.

Fish-out ponds are especially appealing to families with children because bites are plentiful.

They have the potential to generate revenue, but they also require a high amount of management and initial costs.

They offer operators a way to generate more income by selling drinks, food, bait and tackle than they earn from the entry fees and fish that are sold.

Day leasing is a less hectic way of making people pay to fish on your pond. The fish that anglers are going after in this situation are usually just the bass and bluegills that have grown naturally in the pond.

Day-fishing ponds tend to be at least an acre in size, and fees can range from \$5 to \$50 per day for ponds with really big bass.

Some pond owners with prize lunkers and catch-and-release programs report earning as much as \$1,000 per day. Sometimes operators have fee campgrounds around the ponds, and the camping fees include fishing rights.

Plant Pond Crops for Food

There really are not any edible pond plant crops currently being grown in the United States, but there are some opportunities in shallow water agriculture. Rice and cranberries are both farmed in managed wetlands, and watercress and water chestnuts are popular food plants that are frequently cultivated for sale in the United States, usually in cold flowing water or as an alternate planting in flooded rice fields.

Wild rice may hold the most promise as a new crop, as it commands high prices as a gourmet and organically raised food. A wild rice and organic crawdad cropping system may not be the worst idea a pond farmer ever had.

Grow Landscaping Plants for Other Pond Owners

Small garden ponds continue to be a favorite among suburban homeowners, and pond farmers can easily find opportunities to raise horticultural crops to sell to this market. Water lilies, rushes, reeds, bog plants and water irises all seem to find a ready market among homeowners.

Retail customers are in need of both material and advice, and a farm pond owner could develop an active sideline by opening a pond plant nursery. Visiting a full-sized beautiful farm pond can inspire homeowners who are creating their own backyard ponds, and this inspiration can effectively open their wallets.

Grow Aquarium Plants

Pond farmers near a major metropolitan area may find a tremendous opportunity for raising aquarium plants. Planted aquariums are more beautiful and healthier, and the market for good aquarium plants is always high. Both rooted and floating plants are in demand, and even farmers in cold climates can raise considerable quantities of aquarium plants during the warm summer months.

Despite anacharis having pond-weed status, it is still highly valued in aquariums. Other pond pests such as duckweed and cabomba are also constant sellers in the aquarium industry, and many shoreline plants such as acorus are planted into tiny pots and sold as submersible aquarium plants. Any pond farmer should be able to come up with at least one or two aquarium plant species to package and sell as a profitable sideline.