



Project Pond: Fish (and other aquatic livestock) You Can Raise

Your farm pond can offer a home for numerous types of fish—as well as shrimp and frogs—as potential fish-raising business.

(From Project Pond, by Rick Gush, page 2 of 3)

Raise Fish for the Commercial Food Industry

The commercial food fish-raising business in the United States is fairly active and often very competitive.

While some experts have stated that 10 acres of ponds is probably the minimum required to raise catfish or bass profitably, others calculate that a farmer could raise 4,000 fish per acre of pond and earn between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per acre annually. A slightly smaller and potentially more profitable operation could possibly work for trout production if an abundant clean water supply was available.

Most of these modern pond systems are ecologically balanced, and fish waste becomes valuable fertilizer rather than a pollutant as unfortunately occurs in saltwater fish farming.

Channel catfish are the single most popular aquaculture fish in the United States due to their almost boneless meat and the fishes' rapid growth and high tolerance of water temperature variations and crowding.

Trout, striped bass, and tilapia are other commonly raised freshwater edible fish, and all have experienced a dramatic increase in market demand and research studies concerning technology used to cultivate fish in the past decade.

Compared to chickens, fish are considerably more efficient meat producers, often yielding one pound of fish for one pound of fish feed.

Raise Fish For Aquariums

One other possibility for farm pond owners who like the idea of raising fish is to cultivate species that are popular in the aquarium-fish trade. Koi, for instance, will spawn quite well in a pond. One may be able to start with two older but less expensive parents, and start selecting young the first season. Koi are prolific when happy, and the sight of hundreds of youngsters swimming in golden swirls can make an enterprising farmer very happy.

Foreign cichlids and other tropicals are quite tempting, as a few good breeding seasons can produce tremendous revenue, but even Florida occasionally gets temperatures down in the freezing range, and this can be disastrous for a tropical fish pond operation.

Raise Fish for Other Pond Owners

Farm ponds are a big business these days, and everybody who has one seems to want to put more fish into it.

The market for fish to stock all these ponds is enormous, and growers who have good stock find many customers.

Bass, sunfish, grass carp, catfish and trout are the big five, and there is a perennially high demand for these fishes, regardless of the fact that many state agencies give them away for free to pond owners who qualify. (Usually it must be a new or otherwise uninhabited pond.)

Get Involved in Shrimp Farming

During the last 30 years the market for aquaculture shrimp has grown to become one quarter of the world's supply of shrimp. Shrimp are now one of the darlings of the aquaculture industry.

Tropical area shrimp crops grow in three to four months, and produce yields of around one and a half tons per acre, even in the huge ponds and extremely casual conditions that exist now in Asia and the tropical Americas.

Although there are some great tasting coldwater shrimp, warm water does seem to be important, at least to the speed of growth and therefore profitability, and it is unlikely that massive shrimp farms will appear in Alaska soon. But still, the demand for this product is very strong, and smaller but more sophisticated subtropical ponds will surely be producing a significant amount of our shrimp in the future.



Consider Raising Frogs

There have always been a few persons in America who claimed to be frog farmers, but generally these individuals are merely harvesting frogs that grow naturally on their property.

Fencing to exclude predators, and stocking a few tadpoles may have helped things along, but the frogs have always been left to take care of themselves.

The biggest problem with a potential frog-raising operation is that food-quality bullfrogs are slow growers, and take about four years to reach market size. They are also quite cannibalistic, and eat their own young readily.

Frog farms also need to be huge because a bullfrog generally needs at least 20 feet of shoreline as exclusive territory in order to thrive. Finally, the diet of adult bullfrogs is limited to live prey, and pellets just won't do as frog food.

The Crawdad Market Could be For You

Someday, some enterprising farmer is going to figure out that there could be a market for crawdads outside of Louisiana and Texas.

The farmer will probably have to come up with a new name, something like Happy Shrimp, and he'll have to do a little adventurous marketing. But there is absolutely no good reason why the rest of the country should not enjoy these delicious crustaceans.

Most of the crawdads currently raised for food in the United States are grown in the southern states, where they are cultivated in rice fields as an additional crop.

Crawdads are omnivores, and quite happily eat the rice crop residues that are left behind. In general, fields are drained during the summer to encourage weed and leftover crop growth, and then re-flooded in the fall. Crawdads bury themselves in the mud during the summer dry season and emerge when the fields are flooded.

Use Your Pond to Grow Baitfish

In areas close to active fishing spots, pond farmers may want to consider raising baitfish.

The three most common are fathead minnows, goldfish and golden shiners. All three species reproduce prolifically, grow quickly, and do not require any complicated farming methods. These fish can also be sold to pond owners who wish to fatten their trophy bass.

There are over 16,000 baitfish-raising operations in the United States today. They average 44 acres in size and raise an average of 22,000 pounds of fish per year. That adds up to over 35 million pounds of baitfish per year, which means there are a lot of people fishing in America!