There is the potential to double Louisiana's aquaculture output in the next decade - or so a state study says.


Louisiana already ranks at or near the top in the dollar value of its aquaculture crop, producing about $150 million per year from its fish farms (according to 1990 data). The leading producer is the crawfish industry, with 130,000 acres in production generating some $70 million per year in the state.

Catfish farming has some 13,000 acres under cultivation, but has been growing rapidly. Other aquaculture ventures include raising bait fish, catfish, alligators, and a handful of the other staples of the Acadiana table that traditionally have been harvested in the wild.

According to the study, aquaculture composed about 15 percent of edible production in the United States in 1990 and will at least double by the year 2010. The study notes the following good reasons for Louisiana being at the forefront of this dramatic increase in production:

• Every product needs a customer - and the United States is presently the largest market for fish consumption in the world. The average U.S. citizen consumes 17.3 pounds of fish product per year, and this will double in the foreseeable future.

• Biotechnology has brought about improved species for farming and new methods of disease and parasite prevention and cure.

• We have the ingredients for a good aquaculture industry: a long growing season, land suited to the purpose (over 60 percent of Louisiana land has water-retaining ability to construct ponds), an abundance of both surface and ground water, and a suitable climate for cultivation.

And scientists predict that new methods of genetic manipulation in the next decade will dramatically increase the variety and amount of edible fish.

- New telecommunication and marketing techniques are helping to sell Louisiana fish in greater numbers to a worldwide market.

- We are better able to monitor soil and water conditions critical to aquaculture output.

- We've got a head start: Research in all areas of the aquaculture industry, from county agents to Ph.D.'s at Louisiana universities, has given us an aquaculture infrastructure that may rank as the best in the world.

- But, at the same time, the take offish from the sea has leveled off over the last decade to about 90 million metric tons. In the next decade, at least one-fourth of the edible fish products consumed in the United States will come from fish farms.

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Aquaculture: Doing swimmingly

• And, finally, it is something that we have found that we can do well, and that we want to do. Government and citizens alike are willing to invest resources into this prospect.

And there is another reason. We can grow lots of things here. For example, the following:

- **Channel Catfish**: Catfish farming is one of the fastest growing areas of aquaculture.
  - **Golden Shiners**: These fish are grown principally in the mid-South. They are used for bait.
- **Redfish**: The redfish adapts well to culture conditions, and the market demand for it has grown rapidly since 1985, when chef Paul Prudhomme began to popularize his blackened redfish dish.
- **Crawfish**: The secret is out, and more and more markets are opening to Louisiana crawfish.
- **Soft-shell Crawfish**: Commercial development has been limited by lack of feasible harvesting methods, but there is a demand.
- **Giant Malaysian Prawns**: These aren't easy to grow, but may yet develop into a staple of the Acadiana fish pond.
- **Soft-shell Blue Crab**: Soft-shell crabs bring up to seven times more money than hard-shell crabs. Again, the problem is in the harvesting.
- **American Oyster**: Oyster culture is ancient, dating back to at least 95 B.C. The American oyster has high market demand because it is a filter feeder. Pollution is a problem on public water bottoms.
- **American Alligator**: The market is growing for both meat and hides.