



APHIS

Aquaculture Industry Report

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United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

As the new Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), I want to reaffirm this agency's commitment to American aquaculture.

The Secretary of Agriculture is considering a proposal to change the status of farm-raised fish to livestock. This action comes in response to changes in the way aquaculture is viewed by the public and producers.

During my time with the Department of Agriculture (USDA), I have watched our Nation's fish farmers grow and carve out a very important niche in America's overall agriculture plan. Last year, U.S. consumers ate a pound of catfish for every man, woman, and child. That's a lot of catfish!

However, as growers of catfish and other aquaculture species know, it's not always just humans who want to eat the product. Cormorants and other birds can be detrimental to the fish farmer. That's why APHIS' Wildlife Services program offers many nonlethal methods of control that will allow producers to keep their stock safe. Just recently, Wildlife Services completed its cormorant survey in the lower Mississippi River Delta. Working with various State agencies, Federal wildlife biologists developed new population numbers and tested several methods of population control.

I am looking forward to helping Secretary Glickman expand USDA's role in American aquaculture—the fastest growing agricultural sector today.

Sincerely,
Craig A. Reed
APHIS Administrator

USDA Secretary Selects Craig Reed and Joan Arnoldi to head APHIS

In July, Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman announced the selection of Craig A. Reed and Joan M. Arnoldi for the two top positions in APHIS. Reed, the former deputy administrator of the office of field operations at USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, has been confirmed as the agency's administrator. And Arnoldi, who was the head of APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS), is the associate administrator. Both appointees are veterinarians.

Wildlife Services: Protecting American Aquaculture

In February, APHIS' Wildlife Services coordinated the annual double-crested cormorant midwinter census within the entire lower Mississippi River Delta. Personnel from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Delta Wildlife and Forestry Service, Delta Wildlife Foundation, and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries

and Parks assisted with the 2-day census. In all, 68,000 cormorants were counted in 66 night roosts. The 1998 census is 24 percent higher than the 1997 total of 55,000 cormorants. However, the positive effects of the cormorant roost dispersal program were evident: now only 11,500 (17 percent) of the birds are roosting within the major catfish-production region of the central delta. The remainder of the birds are located near the Mississippi River and the Oxbow lakes area, where data indicate the birds roost and feed. This past spring, cormorants were observed nesting in Warren County, MS. This is the first nesting recorded in the delta since 1952.

In March, a depredation order for the control of depredating double-crested cormorants was finalized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This order establishes a procedure that allows commercial freshwater aquaculture facilities to take cormorants without a Federal permit if those birds are found to be committing or about to commit depredations on aquaculture stock. This depredation order applies in the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. The order is limited only to those aquaculture facilities that have established a nonlethal harassment program as certified by APHIS' Wildlife Services. Facilities implementing this order must log the date and number of birds killed. This information must be maintained for 3 years and be made available to Federal or State wildlife officers for inspection.

News From the OIE

The Office International des Epizooties (OIE) recently announced that a conference on risk analysis in aquatic animals will be held at its headquarters in Paris. The International Conference on Risk Analysis in Aquatic Animal Health will take place Feb. 8–10, 2000. This conference will represent the first large-scale opportunity to bring together experts from all over the world to discuss aquatic animal health. Keynote presentations will be made by invited speakers from international agencies, national government departments, academic institutions, and experts in the aquatic animal trade.

OIE recently published a special issue of their *Scientific and Technical Review*. The review provides an indepth overview of the structure and functional methods of veterinary laboratories that work with infectious diseases. For more information on the review, visit OIE's Website at www.oie.int

Recently, OIE agreed to the creation of a quadrilateral working group to study aquatic animal disease concepts. The group will reconsider the current concept of disease categorization in the aquatic animal sector, with the goal to

assist and advise OIE's Fish Diseases Commission. The working group consists of four members representing four countries: Eva-Maria Bernoth of Australia, Stephen J. Stephen of Canada, Matthew Stone of New Zealand, and Otis Miller of the United States.

Shrimp Virus Management Workshop

In July, members of the Shrimp Virus Working Group gathered in New Orleans to develop options and strategies for managing the threat of shrimp viruses to cultured and wild stocks of shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico and southeastern Atlantic waters off the U.S. coast.

The group utilized information gathered from the Shrimp Pathogen Workshop, the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture's Shrimp Virus Work Group report, several 1997 stakeholder meetings, and the Expert Workshop held this past January.

As a result of the management workshop, APHIS could be asked for assistance in laboratory standardization, laboratory approvals, hatchery certification and/or certification of postlarval shrimp, and monitoring frozen shrimp imported into the United States. APHIS may also be asked to assist individual States with developing uniform methods and rules as each develops management practices to address shrimp virus issues.

Veterinary Services Looks Toward the Future

Due to recent increases in aquaculture exports, interstate movement, diseases, and congressional interest, APHIS VS has devoted its resources to developing and conducting basic aquaculture training for VS personnel.

In June, 20 aquaculture specialists completed the VS Western Region's aquaculture training course held at the Hatfield Marine Science Center at Oregon State University. The Salmonid Disease Workshop covered viral, bacterial, and parasitic diseases of salmonids. Immunology, cell cultures, and histology were also discussed in the workshop. Eight of the participants are USDA veterinary medical officers.

Associate Administrator Joan Arnoldi has directed the APHIS aquaculture review team to develop strategic implementation plan to direct the course of APHIS VS' aquaculture activities over the next 2 to 5 years. The team is currently finalizing the plan using the requested input from the aquaculture industries, industry roundtable meetings, and the advisory and assistance contract for aquatic animal health. A draft will be sent to industry for review.

Aquaculture Briefs

In 1997, catfish producers experienced a record-setting year, processing a total of 525 million pounds—about 11 percent higher than the year before. This increase represents an industry product worth more than \$350 million. Catfish farming continues to be a cash crop in the South, with Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama producing the largest yields.

The Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health, a part of APHIS VS, was recently asked to incorporate the States' aquatic health regulations into the existing Regulation Retrieval System for other agricultural species. The regulations will soon be made available on the Internet.



The American Farm Bureau recently met with the Secretary of Agriculture about a rulemaking petition. The petition calls for USDA to issue a rule defining domesticated, farm-raised fish as livestock. VS is currently working with USDA's Office of the General Counsel to determine appropriate rulemaking options with which to respond to the Farm Bureau's petition.



The Florida Legislature has officially recognized aquaculture as agriculture by amending the Florida Aquaculture Policy Act and other State statutes to create (1) a certification program within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to recognize legitimate aquaculture products, (2) an office within the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to assist aquafarmers in acquiring all permits from the Federal to the local level, (3) a new role for the Florida Aquaculture Plan, (4) and a sturgeon production working group to investigate the feasibility of culturing native sturgeon.



Wisconsin passed legislation in 1997 that transfers fish health responsibilities and fish farm registration and licensing from the Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Agriculture.



Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials in San Antonio have filed the first report of white spot disease found in native shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico.



Live tropical fish exports are the number one freight, by volume, departing Tampa International Airport. (Tropical fish farms are a \$52-million-a-year business in Florida.) Each week commercial jets carry 20,000 boxes of tropical fish from Tampa to destinations in the United States, Africa, Japan, Thailand, and many other countries.

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