Future Aquaculture Research at North Dakota's NAC

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Because of the deterioration of net returns being paid to tilapia farmers, NAC is actively looking at alternative species coupled with alternative crops to create a stronger and more competitive aquaculture community in North Dakota.

Criteria for selection of alternative species would include marketability, cost of production and net return, ease of culture and availability of seed stock. NAC is also searching for species which could be fed a diet composed primarily of locally grown crops such as soybean, field peas, lentils, sunflower and others.

In the future NAC will be examining a number of new and innovative projects such as yellow perch culture in North Dakota and a number of other alternative species, such as freshwater lobster and ornamental fish.

There currently exists a deficit of 30 million pounds of yellow perch in the Great Lakes region. This is due to the high popularity of the fish and due to over fishing the natural perch fisheries in the Great Lakes. The wholesale price for perch fillets is more than $9 per pound with an average production cost of about $2.30 per pound. Perch may reach market size of 12 oz in about 12 to 14 months when reared indoors.

NAC is also actively searching for alternative uses of crops for feed additives and protein sources for the ever-increasing aquaculture market. NAC is continually looking for means of increasing the net profit for the aquaculturist.

NAC is beginning a new research project utilizing bluegill sunfish and hybrid sunfish, which are produced by crossing a male bluegill with a female green sunfish. The study will help determine which is most suitable for culture, which reaches market size first and which fish are the most feed efficient. Sunfish have been determined to be of economic interest as food fish.

The outlook for aquaculture in North Dakota is bright so long as producers are willing to be innovative and flexible in selection of cultured species. North Dakota can be on the cutting edge of new species market development and culture methods.