

Perch Market Status and Viability

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Yellow perch, *Perca flavescens* are a common and well known sport fish in North America. Rarely exceeding 1 ½ pounds in the wild, perch are well known for their white flaky flesh. Perch fillets are sweet and mild and take on the flavor of the cooking medium.

Perch have obtained their greatest popularity in the Great Lakes region of the country where nearly 70% of all perch sales occur within 50 miles of the lakes (Malison).

Capture harvests in the Great Lakes have dropped from 33 million pounds per year during the 1950's and 1960's to 11 - 18 million pounds per year in the 80's and 90's. This decrease in supply has given birth to a yellow perch market for fish farmers.

Recent research of the yellow perch market suggests that fish buyers in the U.S and Canada could absorb 50 million pounds of perch production annually. Currently only 200,000 pounds of perch are farmed each year in the U.S.

Fish brokers indicate interest in purchasing farm-raised perch if quality, consistency, price and size requirements are met. Brokers want a high quality product, sold to them in the round (whole fish with heads and entrails), live, or on ice. Uniform size of 1/3 pound round weight per fish is required.

Brokers are willing to pay premium prices for quality and consistency. Prices of \$2.50 to \$3.00 can be expected for perch in the round, while \$7.00 for fillets is normal. If the farmer can produce large numbers, for instance 1 million pounds per year, a price of \$3.50 per pound in the round may be expected.

Yellow perch culture does have its challenges. Small fry are difficult to raise due to their inherent preference of live food. Perch can be difficult to wean from live foods to the commercial diets. Perch are also difficult to spawn artificially during off seasons. Research to date however, promises some great advances for improved culture techniques.