

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

news release

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## FEATURE

### CATFISH FARMING ON THE RISE IN THE SOUTH

A "new" agricultural industry--centuries old in Europe and a thousand years old in Asia--is on the rise in several southern States: Catfish farming for both sport fishing and commercial sales.

The main catfish-farming States today are Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, where there are more than 700 individual enterprises on more than 30,000 acres of farm ponds, producing about 39 million catchable or market-size catfish and more than 50 million fingerlings.

The current wholesale value of the "crop" is running about \$10½ million. Added to this is \$8½ million income from bait minnows also raised on fish farms.

The most profitable arrangement found thus far, one encouraged by fish culturists, is a fish-rice-soybean rotation that makes fish farming an integral part of agricultural operations.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife and the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, in the U.S. Department of the Interior, are working closely with the States, conducting basic research and providing technical assistance. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides financial and technical assistance for building and stocking ponds. Investigations cover the whole spectrum of fish husbandry, including rearing, feeding, and stocking, as well as disease control.

Catfish culture was first seriously considered in the U.S. in 1917 in notes on the rearing, growth, and food of channel catfish in the Transactions of the American Fisheries Society, based on research carried out by the

old U.S. Bureau of Fisheries.

But it was not until the late forties that research at Auburn University, and the University of Oklahoma, and Federal research at Marion, Ala., and Stuttgart, Ark., found catfish rearing feasible. State hatcheries, especially in Arkansas, then helped.

At this point private initiative and capital began to take over, and the industry began to spread.

Maybe one-fifth of today's anglers are fishing in farm ponds. Many of them, children and adults, first cast a line and learned to catch a fish in such waters. And good pond management can be carried out by the owner in his spare time. Fertilization of water, or use of commercial feed, increases the pounds per pond; angling fees bring in extra cash; farmers simply harvest the fish to sell on the market.

Anglers can work ponds only a few minutes and miles from home or office. They can fish a couple of hours in the cool of a summer morning or evening, in the afternoon of warm winter days, or between showers in April.

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife sees a good future for fish farming. More and more people are accepting catfish for food and sport. The Bureau expects cost per pound to drop, production per man-year and production per acre to rise. The Bureau also expects current research to provide catfish with faster growth, greater viability, and better winter hardiness, as well as greater resistance to diseases.

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