DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

THE OFFICE OF FISHERY COORDINATION

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An added "tens of millions of pounds of protein to the Nation's food war chest" from a countrywide chain of farm fish ponds, advocated by Fishery Coordinator Harold L. Ickes, is forecast in an article from the current issue of Fishery Market News, published by the Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Department of the Interior.

"The fact that an acre of impounded water may provide food values equivalent to the yield of ordinary agricultural crops from a comparable land area," says M. C. James, Chief, Division of Fish Culture, and author of the article, "has long been known in the United States. Until recently this fact has been recognized principally by research men and experimenters, and has not been capitalized on for practical purposes. Within the last decade experiments have been undertaken by various agencies, including the Fish and Wildlife Service, its predecessor, the United States Bureau of Fisheries, and State Agricultural Colleges and Conservation Departments, looking toward the development of procedures for a practical application of this principle. The studies of Swingle and Smith at the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama, in particular, have been responsible for a widespread interest in farm pond fish production.

"It is now possible," says James, "to place in the hands of the farmer a set of simple, workable instructions which will enable him to operate a fish pond as an integral part of his farming schedule and to realize from it two or three hundred pounds of usable fish per acre for a period of several years. The species employed are generally large-mouth black bass and bluegill sunfish, but crappie, or other members of the sunfish family, as well as catfish, may be used as the seed stock.

"On the face of it," according to the author, "the whole idea might appear to be merely a scheme to provide recreation and to make farm life more attractive and to be without significance as far as the national food economy is concerned. This would be true unless the farm ponds are developed and stocked on an extensive scale. The Soil Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, have a program which is impressive in its scope. Acting through the local soil conservation districts, or sometimes through the County Agricultural Agents, the Department of Agriculture urges the farmers to construct the ponds and supplies technical advice and guidance in the actual construction. Since the ponds are generally small, ranging from one to five acres in

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area, they present no difficult engineering problems, and can be constructed by the landowner with his own facilities and with a minimum cash outlay. The ponds also have values for agriculture beyond the mere production of fish. Technicians of the Soil Conservation Service are available to give helpful advice on the control and management of the pond after it is completed and stocked.

"The initial stocking, and any subsequent stocking which may be required, is accomplished by the allotment of small fingerlings from Federal or State hatcheries. The species assigned are allotted in proper numerical proportions determined by the size of each pond stocked. During the early part of 1941, the Fish and Wildlife Service consigned some 800,000 young fish to farm ponds although the general program was just getting under way. At the present time, at least six of the Federal hatcheries will have to devote the greater part of their pondfish output to meeting farm pond demands.

"As a prospectus of what this program might lead to, the Soil Conservation Service has estimated that if fifteen out of every one hundred farms in six southeastern States develop ponds, these ponds may be expected to yield 40 million pounds of edible fish. They estimate that Texas alone may support enough ranch ponds and stock tanks to yield an output of 35 million pounds of fish. These estimates are based upon an analysis of actual data and not upon guesswork. The actual magnitude of the program will, of course, be governed by the extent of farmer cooperation. As of December 31, 1940, 10,938 ponds and reservoirs had been constructed by farmers and ranchers cooperating with the Soil Conservation Service, and 4,000 additional ponds had been planned.

"Agencies interested in this program view it first as an attempt to add tens of millions of pounds of protein to the Nation's food war chest. This increment would be derived largely from resources now unutilized. To this tangible return must be added intangible recreational values. It is not possible to say at this time that the farm ponds will produce cash crops. The first intent is to produce fish for home consumption by the farm families, friends, and neighbors. Such locally produced, locally consumed fish will release other agricultural products which the farmer can ship, or will reduce the volume of foodstuffs which might have to be transported to the farm."

Certain natural conditions of weather and topography are recognized as controlling factors in any merging of agricultural and aquicultural activities. Nevertheless, James concludes, "in at least a dozen States conditions are entirely favorable and in others specific areas are suitable. In advocating a fish pond on every farm which can maintain it, Federal and State agencies are hoping to make a moderate but significant contribution toward meeting a food stringency, are convinced that sound farming practices will be strengthened, and are assured that the conservation of wildlife will be benefited."