DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR
news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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AMERICANS' GROWING FONDNESS FOR FISH MEANS
U.S. MUST PRODUCE MORE OR PAY MORE IN TRADE DEFICITS

An increased national appetite for fish--much of it satisfied by foreign countries--was documented in the 1980 National Aquaculture Act. Now, to fulfill the Interior Department's responsibilities under the Act, the Fish and Wildlife Service has announced new strategies to help the developing U.S. aquaculture industry close the gap between America's supply and demand.

The Service, which has the primary Federal responsibility for improving freshwater and anadromous fisheries, will broaden its efforts to provide scientific and technical information to commercial fish culturists. Under the Aquaculture Act, the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce have a shared responsibility to help U.S. fish farmers increase production and reduce the Nation's reliance on imports: In 1980, the U.S. imported some 54 percent of its seafood, much of it from countries whose commercial vessels harvested large catches off U.S. coasts. This $2.7 billion taste for imported finfish and shellfish added five percent to the Nation's trade deficit.

"The public's keen interest in high protein, low cholesterol food has led to skyrocketing fish prices at the supermarket, with the demand for fish rivalling the traditionally popular meats," points out G. Ray Arnett, Interior's Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "To satisfy this demand and to counter the resulting economic imbalance, we must find better ways of producing U.S. fish and fishery products."

Fish culturists have benefitted from the Service's research in fish disease, nutrition, genetics, and culture facilities for more than a century. The development of a nutritionally complete dry fish food revolutionized both public and private aquaculture, while the agency's long-term efforts to restore the Pacific salmon has helped sustain that market. Now, the Service is seeking to assist freshwater and anadromous commercial aquaculturists by making its reservoir of technical skills and information more readily available. This imformation role underlines the Act's provision that the solution to food fish production must lie with the private sector.

The Service also will coordinate programs with land grant universities and other institutions to train aquaculture workers. Selected Service facilities will demonstrate new culture techniques and farmers will be provided unique seed stock of improved genetic strains of such species as

rainbow trout. In addition, some existing Service activities have been pinpointed as critical to aquaculturists, especially research on therapeutic drugs to treat fish diseases.

Studies on fish health, nutrition, genetics, and culture technology will be made available to commercial users through new information channels developed at the Service's National Fisheries Center at Leetown, West Virginia. The Center's Fisheries Academy and its Technical Information Services will coordinate aquaculture training and technical information dissemination respectively, while the Aquaculture Demonstration and Production Station will plan how the latest advances can be shown to aquaculturists across the Nation.

Catfish, trout, and salmon command most culturists' attention, since they have established markets. In the 1950's and 1960's Service-sponsored research on channel catfish helped improve hatchery production and provide a basis for commercial fish farming. Today, some 4,000 participants in the biggest U.S. aquaculture business raise up to 100 million pounds of the whiskered fish on over 60,000 acres in Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas. Increased production is anticipated with better water quality control and improved genetic strains.

Trout were first hatched in the U.S. by fishing clubs to stock private waters. Now, some 30 million pounds of trout are raised annually by commercial farmers. Ninety percent of the industry is located in the Snake River Valley in Idaho, where a vast underground aquifer supplies the most important ingredient for trout culture--a continuous supply of clean, cool water. Trout farmers believe they could increase production with improved disease control, genetics, and artificial manipulation of spawning to step up egg production. The Service is conducting research in all of these areas.

The first Service hatchery opened in 1872 to produce salmon. Today some 150 public hatcheries release nearly 400 million juvenile salmon annually--an important supplement to nature, since the hatchery fish account for nearly half of the country's respective coho and chinook salmon catches. Service scientists are testing methods of inducing hatchery salmon to spawn naturally by water temperature controls and hormone injections. The result: more juvenile fish produced simultaneously to stock rivers.

Fish culturists are proving that some species can thrive in warmwater effluents from power plants, while other species can be grown in waste waters. For example, Service researchers are raising muskellunge fry in sewage lagoons on an experimental basis. The "muskie" is one of many species the Service is producing to enhance recreational fisheries, providing food as well as sport for American anglers and reaping new technology for commercial culturists.

As world demand rises and U.S. commercial fisheries grow more efficient, more and more public officials see aquaculture as one way to assure plentiful food fish. A Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture was established by the 1980 Act to develop a National Aquaculture Plan. The document is now being drafted by representatives of affected Federal agencies, State officials, educators, industry representatives, and others eager to see American fish farmers flourish...and take a substantial bite out of the market for imports.

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