



The black fish with the bug eyes in this photo are Chinese Moors and the lighter colored fish, goldfish.

Goldfish

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official. All the while, he has served as a bank director for the Fulton Bank in Lancaster. Amidst a busy day of hatchery business, phone calls from several states, and appointments for the bank and notary concerns, Hiram Peoples crammed into his schedule some time to show this reporter the workings of this 2½ million goldfish per year production process.

Having driven a short distance from the main office and

warehouses situated in the rural village of New Providence, Peoples started his explanation in the pond area.

"We have 50 to 60 ponds here where the goldfish, bass, and blue gills are raised," he began. "The ponds are fed by creek water," he continued.

The whole pond system in the meadow is supplied with fresh creek water by a series of pipes laid underground starting at the top of the meadow at a dam. An overflow safety system is also part of the underground plan.

Each Spring all of the ponds have to be emptied and disinfected before the new year of hatching begins. Peoples said it takes about one week to drain and disinfect a pond. The fish that are left in the ponds over the Winter hibernate under the ice. In the early Spring, they are removed from the larger ponds and kept in smaller storage ponds until they can be returned to the disinfected ponds once more.

Peoples explained that the fish have to be raised in earth-bottom ponds.

"Some soils do not work well for fish hatchery purposes," he related. "England does not have any soil that will grow gold fish properly. Italy does, but they are a very poor quality," he mentioned by way of illustration.

"This soil here on these 20 acres is very good for fish ponds," he remarked.

With the requirements of the right soil for pond bottoms and the necessary fresh water supply and the assistance of 22 full and part-time employees, Peoples Hatchery operates a thriving business.

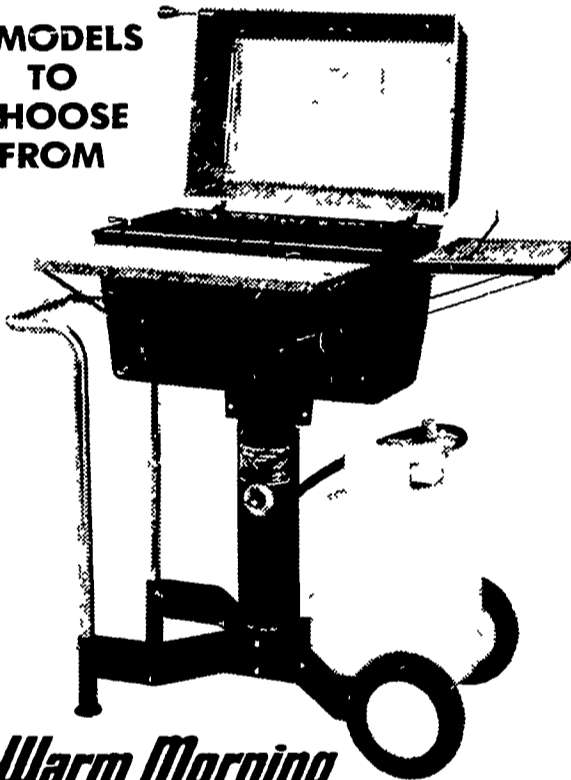
To make the most of the facilities available, and to keep a constant supply of live goldfish throughout the year, even when the fish normally hibernate in the Winter, Peoples has constantly learned newer management techniques over the years. His grandfather, Hiram Peoples Stager, started with one large pond. Now his grandson manages in excess of 50 ponds, aluminum storage tanks for Winter use, and seven delivery tank trucks. A number of changes have taken place since 1880 when the founder of this hatchery started the business.

"By the old method of fish hatching," Peoples explained, "You would allow the fish to spawn and hatch in the same pond and then collect out of the pond whatever happened. Now we use breeder ponds where the female lays her eggs upon a spawning net." These nets are wire screens which have spanish moss entwined in and out of the wire mesh. The male follows the female and throws his sperm on the eggs the female has recently laid.

"If the male and female are not equal in size, and the male is smaller, for instance, he will not be able to cover the entire egg area and all those uncovered eggs will be lost. That is why we sort the fish for the breeding pond to keep uniform sizes," Peoples added.

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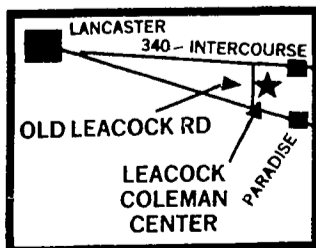
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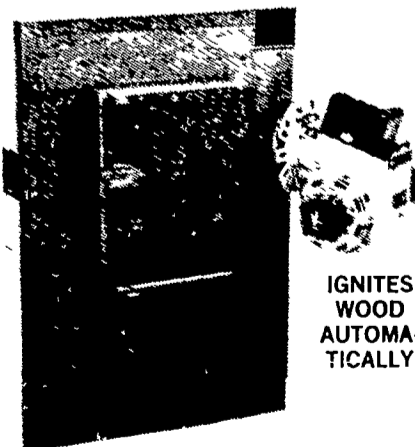


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Once the spawning nets are covered, they are removed from the breeding pond and placed into another pond for hatching. When covered with spawn, the nets are white. Without the spawn on them they are dark gray in color.

"By using the breeding ponds, the spawning nets and separate hatching ponds, you can use your ponds more efficiently," remarked Peoples. "You can increase your production from 50,000 to half a million, and you have much better control by using this newer method."

"You are left to the mercy of the weather as far as hatching goes," he added.

Once the fish are hatched, their size will depend on the cubic feet of water each fish has to swim in. The fish are fed every day until Fall to give them plenty of body fat to hold them through Winter's hibernation. The goldfish hatch in the Spring and are sold in the Fall as are the bass. The blue gills have to be a year old before they are sold, however.

As the fish hatch in the hatching ponds during the Spring, they are taken out and sorted on wooden sorting tables twice a week. After being sorted according to size gradations by inches, they are placed into wire mesh holding cages inside a storage building with sides open to the elements. The cages are two and one-half feet wide by five feet in length.

Part of the storage area is used to hold purchased orders of goldfish overnight. Each day, usually in the afternoon, the fish are counted out on the sorting tables and placed into similar cages and coded by purchasing orders. The fish stay in the filled-order cages overnight. At 3 o'clock in the morning the delivery tank trucks pull up to the storage area and load the orders for that day's delivery.

"We want the fish to be in the tank trucks for as short a time as possible," Peoples explained. "Some of the fish are hauled for as much as three days, though, without problems because air is agitated into the delivery tanks," he added.

For local delivery or those which are shipped by United Parcel, the fish are placed in plastic bags inside cardboard boxes. Most of the goldfish are delivered by tank trucks, however.

To keep a supply on hand for Winter distribution, Peoples utilizes special Winter equipment supplied with Spring water. Aluminum tanks have the Spring water supplied to them and the half million fish are fed and maintained in these tanks as if it were not their Winter hibernation period.

The biggest problem with fish hatching is hot weather, according to Peoples. Trout need colder water than found in Lancaster County ponds to survive through hot summers, he explained. The goldfish, bass and bluegills, however, will tolerate warmer water.

To establish bluegill or bass in a farm pond, Peoples suggests that the owner have it properly stocked according to cubic feet of water per fish. The bass and blue gills are very adaptable to the pond environments found locally, said Peoples, and will maintain their population themselves for at least five years. They need not be fed, but an application of 5-10-10 fertilizer at a rate of 100 pounds to an acre of water surface would be advised.

As with most other farming techniques and operations, the raising of goldfish, bass, and bluegills requires constant upgrading of management to improve production and quality as well as efficiency.

To drive past the quiet meadow with its ponds scattered across its breadth and length, one would hardly imagine that such a large business and such precise scientific technology is actually controlling the peaceful ponds. And behind all of that is an energetic man who says retirement is not in the picture as far as he is concerned.

"Retirement is the worst thing to happen to a lot of people and I don't intend to ever retire!" he stated.

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