

Swapping Pork For Perch

PIKETON, Ohio - Farmers looking for an alternative to raising pigs or growing corn may want to give fish a try, said Chris Bennett, vice president of Bennett Fish, Inc.

"Traditional agricultural markets have become difficult to compete in, and I've heard of farmers raising ostrich as something different to sell. But there's not much of a market for that," Bennett said. "Fish are an excellent alternative because the existing market is strong and may of the wild fisheries are collapsing."

Bennett is one of many presenters who will discuss aquaculture and the potential for Ohioans to become fish farmers at an "Aquaculture 101" workshop on Saturday, Jan. 16, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Ohio State University's Piketon Research and extension center in Piketon. Bennett's family has been in the fish business for nearly 80 years, primarily as commercial processors. He began raising fish as a hobby in 1992.

Most fish farmers in Ohio raise fish for pound stocking, but the demand to raise fish for food certainly exists, Bennett said.

For example, the demand for yellow perch in the Great Lakes

region is about 11 million pounds per year. But only about 5 million pounds of yellow perch are caught from the Great Lakes each year. So wild fisheries supply less than 50 percent of the demand, and the rest is being supplied by imports from other parts of the United States and Europe, he said.

"There is a growing consumer demand for fish as the United States becomes a more health-conscious nation, and we need to produce product to meet that demand," Bennett said. "There is a void in the market for fish such as yellow perch, but few farmers have really commercially produced them yet."

Aquaculture is an opportunity for farmers to diversify their operations and supply a demand in the market, said Laura Tiu,

aquaculture research and extension associate at the Piketon Research and Extension Center. Ohio has about 50 licensed fish producers, and only 10 of those raise fish full time.

The United States set a record in 1997 in seafood deficit, importing \$7.3 billion of seafood and only exporting \$2.7 billion. The nation produces 19 million pounds of tilapia, a popular variety of fish, but imports 75 to 80 million pounds. The potential is there. Tiu said, "Many of the fish Americans eat out of the ocean are either over-fished or approaching over-fished status."

"Aquaculture is the fastest growing segment of U.S. agriculture today, and I am constantly inundated with service and information requests about rais-

ing fish," she said. "That's why we decided to conduct the workshop, so interested people could learn how to get started, what the opportunities are and that we're here to help."

Topics that will be covered at the workshop are basic principles of aquaculture, site selection and pond construction, water quality and aeration, production methods, cage construction, recirculating systems, species selection, feeds and feeding, business planning, and marketing and processing.

"We've done aquaculture research here at Piketon for about nine years, and hopefully the workshop will help us gauge what direction aquaculture in Ohio should go," Tiu said. "If it is successful, we'll probably hold other workshops throughout the


state in the future."

Registrations for the workshop is \$20, which covers hand-out and a catered lunch. The registration deadline is Jan. 8. The daylong workshop is sponsored by the Ohio State University's Centers at Piketon, Ohio State University's School of Natural Resources, and the North Central Region Aquaculture Center at Michigan State University.

For more information about fish farming and the "Aquaculture 101" workshop, contact Tiu at (800) 297-2072 in Ohio only, (740) 289-2071 outside the state, or by e-mail (tiu.2@osu.edu). Information and registration also is available on-line (<http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~prec>).



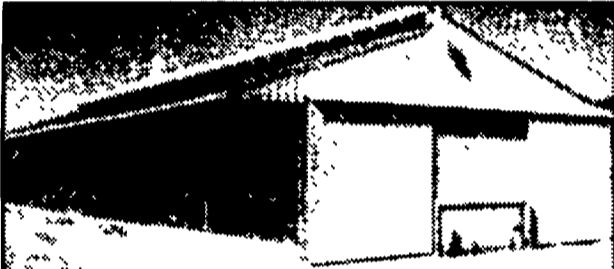
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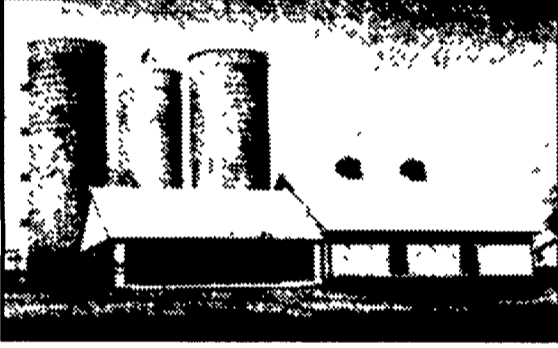
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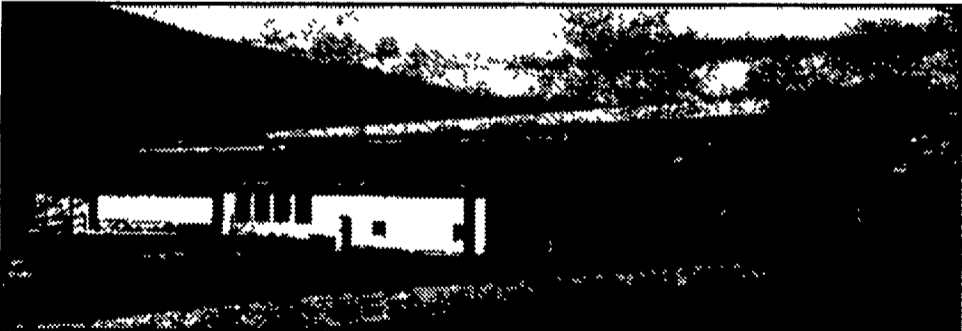


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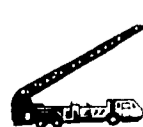
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