



APHIS **Aquaculture Industry Report**

July 1996

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

This is my first Aquaculture Industry Report since taking over from Dr. Lonnie King as the Administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) this July. I look forward to working with you in building American aquaculture, the fastest growing segment of U.S. agriculture.

As we receive feedback from aquaculture specialists across the country, APHIS continues to address the concerns and listen to the ideas of producers and consumers. The new opportunities and challenges are endless, and we will continue to assist aquaculture producers by promoting and protecting the health of America's aquacultural resources. New doors are opening daily for our products, and APHIS will be there to help the industry meet the demands of a world market.

We are always looking for new ideas from producers, researchers, and industry specialists. Our national aquaculture coordinator, Otis Miller, D.V.M., is always available for questions or feedback. You may reach Dr. Miller by telephone at (301) 734-7679 or via the Internet at omiller@aphis.usda.gov.

Sincerely,
Terry L. Medley
APHIS Administrator

Aquaculture Legislation

APHIS is developing, as part of USDA's legislative program, legislation that will authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to regulate the movement of aquatic plants and animals in interstate and foreign commerce and enter into cooperative programs to ensure the health of aquatic plants and animals. For USDA to provide a full range of health services to the aquaculture industry, such as those currently afforded to other livestock, poultry, and plant species, amendments to the animal health statutes specifically providing for such authority or new legislation are necessary.

During consideration of the 1996 farm bill, aquaculture legislation was included in the Senate version. In that bill, the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to treat private aquaculture as agriculture. In other legislative proposals, aquaculture is, at times, defined as "livestock." While APHIS is eager to provide the same services to the aquaculture industry that the Agency currently provides for livestock and poultry, we are not convinced that this can be accomplished simply by broadly redefining aquaculture as part of agriculture. In order to clarify the issue, APHIS has asked the USDA's Office of the General Counsel for an opinion.

Rep. Richard Hastings (R-WA) and Rep. Peter A. DeFazio (D-OR) recently introduced legislation, the Domesticated Salmonid Broodstock and Seedstock Act of 1996 (H.R. 2908), that would—if passed—require the

Secretary of Agriculture to develop a comprehensive program of diagnostic and certification services, establish health criteria, and monitor, evaluate, and facilitate the elimination of impediments to the commerce of domesticated salmonid broodstock and seedstock. This legislation relies on the authority under animal quarantine laws to authorize health services in a limited segment of the aquaculture industry.

Currently, an aquaculture industry advisory committee can be established under the Federal Advisory Committee Act without the need for a statutory mandate. APHIS believes the U.S. Animal Health Association's Aquaculture Committee provides a venue for the aquaculture industry to express its concerns. APHIS strongly hopes for enhanced communication within the aquaculture industry and encourages the industry to use every opportunity to make us aware of its problems and concerns. To facilitate this, APHIS plans to soon host its second aquaculture industry roundtable. APHIS will continue to provide timely aquaculture information through this industry report.

Export Health Certification

APHIS has authority to issue export health certificates for aquaculture animals and products. Area Veterinarians-in-Charge (AVIC's) in all States are currently authorized to endorse health certificates stating that animals and products in question meet the requirements of importing countries. Inability to obtain export health certification should no longer be an obstacle to any aquaculture producer interested in foreign markets. APHIS is eager to expand the network of aquatic animal disease laboratories approved to perform diagnostic tests for export and attaches a high priority to the approval of new laboratories. Two States (Washington and California) currently have approved laboratories, and the agency is pleased that laboratories in several other States have expressed an interest in becoming approved.

Negotiations With the European Union

European Union (E.U.) animal health negotiators have been extremely concerned that U.S. aquatic animal health regulations are not equivalent to those of the Union. The E.U.'s main concern is that the United States does not have a "competent authority" for aquatic animal disease. A "competent authority" means a single, Federal agency with legal authority to monitor, prevent, and control outbreaks of aquatic animal disease. Currently, U.S. responsibility for aquatic animal disease is divided among three Federal departments (Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce) and the 50 States. The best way to clarify this regulatory uncertainty is to establish a single Federal regulatory agency with clear responsibility for the health of privately cultivated aquatic

species. APHIS is working with the Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture's (JSA) Task Force on Aquatic Animal Health to clarify Federal agency roles, avoid duplication of authority, and achieve adequate protection of U.S. aquatic animals, both wild and cultivated. The Task Force has an extremely important mission and APHIS encourages the aquaculture industry to communicate its animal health concerns to the JSA. Delegating primary Federal responsibility for aquatic animal health to a single agency should not add to the aquaculture industry's regulatory burden. It is the best way to dramatically reduce possible confusion about agency roles. APHIS' legislative proposal is primarily intended to satisfy the E.U.'s requirements. At this time, the Union has given the United States only provisional approval for export of aquaculture animals and products and that can be withdrawn at any time.

JSA Committee on Shrimp Viruses

APHIS is participating in the JSA's Committee on Shrimp Viruses. The multiagency committee's activities have included two interagency teleconferences and sponsorship of an Integrated Assessment of Shrimp Viruses workshop in New Orleans in June. During the workshop, Dr. Otis Miller gave a presentation on APHIS' role in aquaculture, and Dr. Richard Fite, a veterinarian in our Policy and Program Development division, presented a quantitative method for performing risk assessments. APHIS has substantial experience adapting quantitative risk-assessment methods to agricultural issues and has agreed to assist the interagency shrimp virus risk-assessment group. The group will evaluate the possible routes by which foreign shrimp viruses may have been introduced into the United States and regulatory options for preventing the establishment of exotic viruses in the future. Because no Federal agency has authority to prevent and control the introduction of foreign shrimp viruses, regulatory interventions have been entirely at the State level.

Catfish and Trout Loss

In 1995, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), working cooperatively with APHIS, conducted a national survey of wildlife-caused losses to agriculture. Overall, 58 percent of producers reported some wildlife-caused loss; 71 percent of producers of catfish and trout reported wildlife-caused losses. Birds were most frequently cited as the cause of catfish and trout depredation. The high frequency of losses, together with the complexity of mitigating damage caused by migratory birds, prompted APHIS' Animal Damage Control (ADC) program to request that NASS focus its 1997 loss assessment on wildlife-caused losses of catfish.

To help design the best possible survey of wildlife-caused losses of catfish, ADC and NASS met with catfish producers in Starkville, MS, July 17. An overview of wildlife-caused losses of agriculture in 1994 and a video of fish-eating birds dining at catfish ponds were followed by an excellent discussion among meeting participants.

Attendees agreed on the importance of determining the species of wildlife causing losses and quantifying the

distribution of losses among producers. The audience also agreed that figures tracking the cost of wildlife-caused damage to catfish producers should include costs engendered by producer efforts to prevent losses as well as the value of catfish eaten. Various units within USDA will work together to complete the loss assessment and provide needed information on changes in depredating bird populations and feeding behavior. We anticipate that the information will help resolve problems in reducing the losses of catfish to wildlife.

APHIS and Risk Assessment

Since its inception, APHIS has held the primary responsibility for implementation of U.S. agricultural quarantine laws. Through the years, APHIS has acquired considerable expertise in preventing the introduction of foreign agricultural pathogens and in controlling and eradicating such pathogens when discovered in the United States. Perhaps the greatest lesson we have learned is the importance of careful risk assessment. APHIS is recognized internationally as a world leader in performing risk assessments on replicating agents. We know that maintaining commerce and trade can be as important as preventing disease outbreaks and that balancing the one against the other is never easy. Our goal is to design strategies to achieve acceptable levels of disease risk without unduly burdening producers, restricting trade or endangering wild aquatic resources. Risk assessment is the tool that allows us to do this.

Quarantine is one of many tools used for reducing disease transmission. Movement restrictions should be used only as a last resort, and restrictions should be narrowly limited to the commodities and locations necessary to control a specific disease problem. Movement restrictions should be temporary and should specify achievable conditions and times for release. APHIS does not impose movement restrictions if a less stringent regulatory action will achieve the same purpose. On those occasions, when movement restrictions have been necessary, our actions have been overwhelmingly supported by most of the affected industry. Our goal is and always has been to facilitate commerce while controlling disease.

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