

Catfish Farming in Ponds in Virginia

Commercial catfish farming has not proved to be successful in Virginia. No full-time commercial catfish producers are in business in Virginia at this time. Limited production of catfish occurs in some ponds and in cages in ponds, largely in eastern Virginia. Catfish farming in the state is limited by a number of factors including: (1) the short growing season (less than 180 days in most of the state), (2) the high cost and limited availability of fingerling fish and feed (small catfish may cost as much as \$ 0.25-0.50 each and feed may cost as much as \$ 0.25 cents per pound). If catfish are selling for about \$0.65/ pound and you have invested a minimum of \$0.50 to start, you may only be making at maximum \$ 0.10/pound under optimum conditions. At this rate, you better be growing a lot of catfish. The absence of a processing and marketing network in Virginia is another major problem. Finally, severe competition with southern growers in the states of Mississippi and Alabama who have nearly year-round growing conditions, extensive pond and water resources (50-100 acre ponds are not unusual), and can market large numbers of catfish at wholesale prices of \$0.65 per pound. Catfish are warmwater fish and will not grow in outdoor ponds in the winter in Virginia. We found that to rear a marketable-sized channel catfish (1.25 pounds) in one year in ponds, you needed to start with a 0.5 pound fish.

I consider catfish farming in Virginia in outdoor ponds to have limited economic potential, providing only supplemental income and marginal profit opportunity, probably averaging less than \$100 per acre per year. Other fish species such as trout and striped bass may be more lucrative to grow depending on available water quantity and quality. Other fish farming systems, particularly indoor fish farming may provide greater potential. Other fisheries enterprises such as a recreational catfish fee fishing pond may offer greater profit.

At Virginia Tech, we specialize in high-density indoor fish farming in recirculation aquaculture systems where you can carefully control environmental conditions and fish growth. We have had good success with tilapia, striped bass, and yellow perch, but have had much luck with catfish. You are welcome to make an appointment to visit the Virginia Tech Recirculating Aquaculture system.

For more information on catfish farming in ponds and cages, please contact Brian Nerrie, Virginia State University, Box 540, Petersburg, VA 23803.

Listed below are web sites with information on fish farming in general:

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/fisheries/420-897/420-897.html>

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/fisheries/420-010/420-010.html>

Fact Sheets on catfish:

<http://www.msstate.edu/dept/srac/fslist.htm>

Sincerely,

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