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Getting the fishfarm ready and then operating it

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Getting the fishfarm ready

AND THEN OPERATING IT

By **M Castaños**

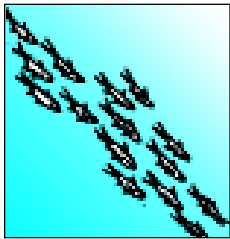
Having bought or leased the farm area and sourced the operation money, the next step is getting the fish farm ready. Below is an overview of farm operations.

Whether you're running a fishpond or a netcage/pen, thoroughly **inspect the farm site first**. Repair those structures that



need to be repaired or replace them; pay special attention to pond leaks, broken gates, net tears, and/or pen gaps. The bottomline is, the stock should not be able to escape nor should pests and predators easily come in and compete for food and space with your stock. Check equipment, power supply, and other necessary stuff.

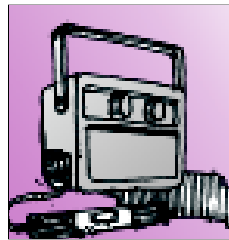
Ponds would need **special preparation**, like the growing of natural food (*lablab* or *lumot*), especially when the culture system is extensive or semi-intensive. This may take at least a month. You may need to apply lime, organic (environment-friendly) pesticides like teaseed powder to kill pests/predators inside the pond, and (organic) fertilizers like chicken manure to support the growth of natural food. Eradicate snails in milkfish ponds by drying or using metaldehyde-based products. Some cultured species have special requirements, like extra shelter and mounds (i.e., grouper and mudcrab). Prepare these as well.



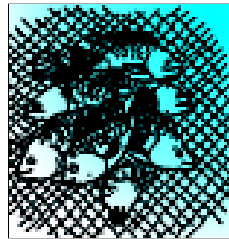
After these preparations, it is now time to **stock the fry**. The usual source for bulk purchase is the hatchery (especially for tiger shrimp) or the fry bodega (these are middlemen who buy directly from fry gatherers of wild grouper, milkfish, and other fry). It is best if you get from reputable sources. Note that you can have the fry delivered right to your farm or you can pick these up yourself. Stock the fry in early morning when it is cooler to avoid stressing the fish.

Like a human baby, your growing stock would need **care and close attention**. See if the stock is eating well and the water is relatively of good quality. Natural food in ponds is usually "consumed" in about a month in semi-intensive culture, but this can be visually checked. [For extensive culture, inorganic fertilizer may be used as "dressing" every two weeks after water change to maintain growth of natural food.] Then its time to give artificial feed. But first, sample the stock so you'll know how much to feed. This means you fish out a few of the stock, weigh and measure them. Keep a record, and use the feeding rate ap-

propriate for a certain fish size and estimated survival and growth. Feed companies usually recommend feeding rates with their products. There are also cases where fresh feed or live feed is called for. Live tilapia or trash fish are fed to grouper, seabass and/or mudcrab.



As for water quality, these should be monitored at least weekly. Check the dissolved oxygen (especially morning DO), temperature, salinity and water depth. For DO-temp, a YSI oxygen meter is relatively easy to operate; for salinity, a refractometer is very accurate (not your tongue!); and for water depth, a simple calibrated



wood stuck in the middle of the pond will suffice. Another routine is the changing of water. This usually follows the lunar or tidal cycle. Drain water when its low tide and replenish during high tide (by pump if not natural tidal flow). It is a must that you keep a calendar carrying the dates and heights of low/high tides in your farm office.

If all goes well, you can **harvest in 4- or 5 months**. Remember that timing is also important. The law of supply-and-demand holds especially true for milkfish. Shrimp, on the other hand, has basically remained a seller's market after the industry slump caused by disease problems. You can have a buyer get your produce at the farm or you can go to the fish port to sell it (see our related story on fish marketing, page 23).

In harvesting, take note of the natural characteristics of your stock. Milkfish, for instance, swim against the current. So, farmers harvest by the *pasulang* method. That is, they let out water during low tide, then let it in again in high tide; when milkfish congregate near the pond gate in response to the water current, a matting made of bamboo is made to encircle the stock. Harvest becomes easy.

Other crops would have to be harvested the hard way -- seining then totally draining pond water (like shrimp) or manually and painfully (like mudcrab).

The fresher, the better. The recommended way in bringing harvest to the market is by chilling in ice water and adding crushed ice in between shrimp/milkfish layers. Of course, other crops are more acceptable when marketed live, like grouper, seabass, and mudcrab.

We hope you have a profitable experience. ###