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Aqua Farm News

1996

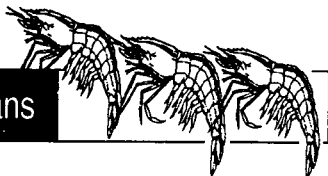
Go slow, check your technology

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, Aquaculture Department (1996). Go slow, check your technology. Aqua Farm News, 14(4-5), 7-8, 10-11.

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'Go slow, check your technology'

This is the most common advice shrimp culture veterans in Negros (west central Philippines) give other shrimp farmers in southeast Asia. The Negros entrepreneurs, always fond of monocrop culture, were hit hard with the tiger shrimp industry's boom-and-bust cycle that started in the mid-'80s. **Four intensive shrimp farmers** share their experiences and their outlook of the industry's future. It is not far off that these are the same experiences of farmers in other SE Asian countries that were also hit hard by disease outbreaks.

"We used to earn P1 million from a 0.4 ha pond. But with over-intensification, the use of antibiotics in particular, we have created our own monster..."

- *Claudette Jalandoni*

Claudette Jalandoni's family owns fishponds in Silay (27 hectares for shrimp-milkfish culture) and Sarabia (20 ha shrimp). "I had no experience in the field," Claudette relates with gusto, "but I finally made it in 1978 after three years of trial and error. (The giant conglomerate) San Miguel Corp. first convinced me to culture shrimp." She related how she was cheated by a fry dealer, giving her "butete" (pufferfish) instead of what she thought was sea bass. "From then on, I get up at 2:00 in the morning to attend to buying our fry even though we had 40 people in our employ," she says. "I find it important to have a 'personal touch' and hard work in order to know the ins and outs of shrimp culture."

Her Silay farm has since been converted to milkfish ponds with stocking density of 5,000 to 10,000 per ha and with artificial feeding. In Sarabia, half of the area is still shrimp and the

rest devoted to an AQD collaborative project on mud crab pond culture and milkfish culture using hatchery-produced fry. "Our capital includes 1 ton of merthiolate," she jokes, "for wounds caused by the mud crabs' pinchers. We may feed poachers to thin crabs."

They used to stock 18-20 shrimp per m², and harvest around 6-7 tons per ha. Claudette felt lucky that she allowed her farm to lie fallow in 1989 when she went on a European trip. That year, practically all farms in Negros were hit by MBV, IHHNV, among others.

On shrimp diseases, Claudette blames Taiwanese technologies. "Overintensification resulted in pollution and eventually diseases," she says. "This luminous bacteria is dreadful. Our world-renowned aquaculturists should gather and work together on this problem. Do you know the movie *The Andromeda Strain*? Why not this kind of research? Why not seek the help of US scientists?" *The Andromeda Strain* is a 1971 tense science-fiction thriller film based on a Michael Crichton (who wrote the world hit *Jurassic Park*) novel about a team of scientists attempting to isolate and find a cure for a deadly alien microbe.

Though not as comprehensive or focused, something similar is being done. The task force *Oplan Sagip-sugpo* (transl. as Save-the-Shrimp), was formed by the Department of Agriculture in September (see pages 30-31). The task force is headed by AQD Chief Dr. Rolando Platon. "*Sagip-sugpo* may be part of the answers to all our problems," Claudette says, profusely thanking AQD for taking the initiative. "AQD can help. We need someone to focus the efforts of (donor or funding) agencies."

For now, she's readying a 7-ha pond for AQD to field-test crab culture as an alternative to tiger shrimp. "I wanted to have natural practices (like crab culture), meaning I do not want to use

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antibiotics anymore. We have created our own monster," Claudette notes, referring to possible strains of bacteria that scientists fear are already antibiotic-resistant. She also cited regulations that shrimp farmers have to consider. "We don't want antibiotic residues to show in tests in export markets like Japan. We are aware of withdrawal periods ... But disease problems forced my hand to use antibiotics."

Other than king crab, Claudette is also planning to polyculture shrimp and milkfish. "But milkfish is not as profitable as shrimp. We used to earn P1 million per pond [0.4 ha]. If the industry doesn't get help, *kanugon sa* industry (what a waste)!"

"We lost with the luminous bacteria. Something should be done."

- Freddie Ang

The Ang farm is about an hour ride from Bacolod City. Juanito Ang started shrimp farming in 1979, and the farm is managed by his brother Freddie, a marine biologist and a management graduate. "I haven't had any technical background on shrimp culture," Freddie says, "My only experience is breeding freshwater fishes in aquaria as a hobby."

"We'll go with shrimp no matter where the industry takes us," Freddie declares. "Shrimp is very profitable and we hope that something will be done soon to address the problems on diseases." But this belief has not prevented his family from planning to go into grouper or lobster culture, the commodities farmers call the shrimp alternatives (see pages 22-27).

Freddie notes the luminous bacteria in shrimp grow-out caused them to lose heavily in 1989. "We used to get 4.5 metric tons per pond, our pond averages 0.5 hectare, but we can harvest only 2.5 tons now."

Like other shrimp growers, Fred laments the sorry state of the industry. "Something needs to be done because we seem to be running out of strategies to combat the (luminous bacterial) disease. We have tried everything we were advised to do but to no avail."

Freddie, however, hasn't heard of *Oplan Sagip-sugpo* but says "I'm thankful to learn that the government is concerned about saving the industry. Of course, any help SEAFDEC can extend is welcome."

"I'm banking on changing species to 'eliminate' luminous bacteria, then go back to shrimp again. My advice is - go slow and check your technology."

- Bobby Sanson

Bobby Sanson joined the Negros Prawn Producers Marketing Cooperative, Inc. in 1987 to avail of the government's tax credit for shrimp farmers and to get updated market information (more on NPPMC! on pages 28-29). He never regretted joining the 'Coop' and he never regretted going into shrimp culture. "We still make money," he says.

Bobby's family bought a 25-ha abandoned sugar farm near Bacolod City in 1986 and converted it to a shrimp farm. He now cultures shrimp (5 ha), grouper (1 ha) and milkfish (3 ha). "But I don't like milkfish. The profit is small and with our land tax, we can't earn anything." His farm is zoned residential-industrial, not agricultural.

Bobby used to stock 50 shrimp per m² but with the outbreak of luminous bacteria, he now stocks 25 per m². He used to harvest 5 tons per ha twice a year but with all the disease outbreaks, he was able to harvest only once a year. "The mid-1996 is our worst year," Bobby says. He uses brown sugar, about 10 kilos per 0.5 ha, to control the luminous bacteria (see related story on page 34). He also uses three kinds of antibiotics, alternating application and observing withdrawal periods. He is also waiting for the result of a product that is marketed as anti-residue for antibiotics by a US company.

"I'd rather go into other species like mudcrab than go semi-intensive on shrimp. But the next problem is fry supply. My advice to farmers is to go slow and check your technology," he says.

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NEGROS SHRIMP VETERANS

(top-down): Claudette Jalandoni, Freddie Ang, Bobby Sanson, Bob Gatuslao



"I'm banking on changing species to 'eliminate' luminous bacteria, then go back to shrimp again," he further explains. "With AQD, there is a better future for aquaculture in general, but maybe not for shrimp." But this outlook has not prevented Bobby from collaborating with AQD on field-testing probiotics (see page 12) to try to control luminous bacteria. Bobby also collaborates with AQD on grouper culture.

Bobby also worries about the future of shrimp in the country. "Processing plants are closing down and there might not be markets next year." He agreed with other Coop members that intensive farming methods did 'kill' the industry. He cited Sarabia where one river supplies water to about 300 hectares of shrimp farm. He wasn't surprised that the area was the first to go down.

"I actually prefer Iloilo entrepreneurs' slow but sure attitude. Negrenses are risktakers with a band wagon mentality. So, if one flops, all flop ...*patas* (it's fair)," he says wryly. "Negros might become known as the province that killed the industry."

For Bobby who graduated from La Salle in 1990 (agribusiness management) and is raising a two-month old daughter, his stake in the industry is about survival. "Our lands are products of our efforts. We did not just inherit them. Thus, I'll be willing to pay for environmental clean-up, even 10% of my income," Bobby states.

"I'm concerned about the lack of education of most fisherfolk on environmental issues, and the consequences of their actions."

- Coop President Bob Gatuslao

"I can now look forward to a bright future," comments Bob Gatuslao on AQD's involvement with the shrimp industry in Bacolod. "This is the first time we felt AQD's presence. It is indeed a very welcome move of Dr. Platon in taking the initiative to save the industry."

Bob is a member of a shrimp growers' cooperative in Negros (more on pages 28-29). A civil engineer by profession, Bob is also a lawmaker by heart. He was a national legislator for eight years and is still active in politics. He has a daughter and two sons.

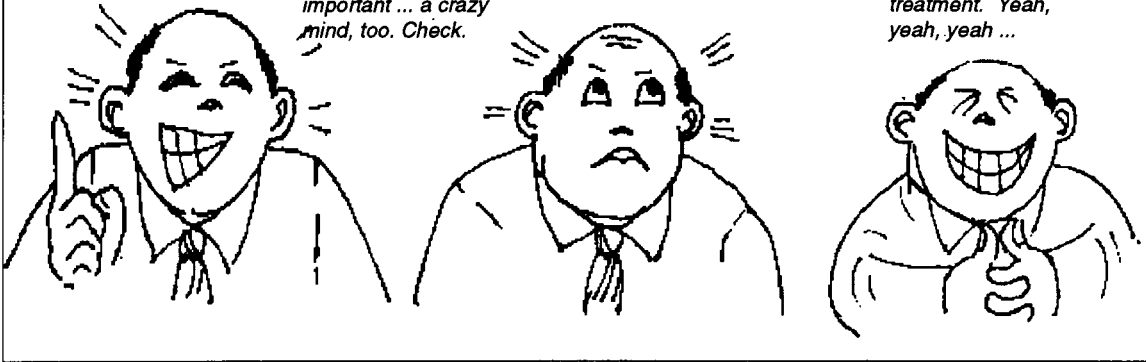
"I shifted to shrimp farming only after the collapse of the sugar industry, but with diseases plaguing the industry, we seem to be facing another collapse. But the shrimp

A farmer with a plan ...

Intensive shrimp culture ... hmmm ... I should have P1 million, check; aerators, check; feeds, check; fry source, uh uh uh ... perhaps a rest house in my farm? Guts is important ... a crazy mind, too. Check.

Oh. I shouldn't forget the add-ons ... pollution, wastewater, luminous bacteria ... or is MBV better? White spot maybe? ... the salaries of my disease consultants, too.

Aha! I might as well stock ... more antibiotics? Nah, it's bad. Probiotics is reportedly good ... yes to that then. I should think of allowing for wastewater treatment. Yeah, yeah, yeah ...



industry is not dead. It's only dormant," he insisted, " and I hope this state is temporary. The shrimp growers in Negros are very willing to cooperate with the experts to save it."

Bob offered to the Department of Agriculture his 110-hectare shrimp ponds for collaborative studies. AQD is also using his ponds for a study evaluating the nursery and grow-out of milkfish from hatchery-produced fry. "I am anticipating good results." But Bob worries about the commodities dubbed shrimp alternatives. "While shifting to milkfish farming may be good for the farmer, there's the problem on fry supply. But if AQD can go big-scale in milkfish hatcheries, we can have a steady and inexpensive supply of fry. Two months ago, the fry was only P0.60 a piece but it's now P0.80. In Taiwan, it's only P0.30. Feed costs P13 a kilo here but only P9 in Taiwan. We really need to have a very strong, concerted effort to help the industry deal with all its problems."

"I believe so much in AQD because I know a lot of shrimp growers in other countries were trained by AQD," Bob says. "The industry's slump in the late '80s due to overintensification has taught us a good lesson. My colleagues in the industry are now slowing down on antibiotics. If we follow the recommendations and ad-

vice of experts then I think the industry will regain its lost glory."

Upon the advice of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Bob initiated a barangay project in Himamaylan (south of Bacolod City) to plant 30,000 seedlings of mangroves along a river bank. "Mangroves," he said, "is necessary to protect river banks. But I am concerned about the lack of education of most fisherfolk on environmental issues, and the consequences of their actions." Bob supports the creation of a Department of Fisheries that can address the issues of sustainability and profitability of the industry. "Looks like the industry has been neglected for a long time," he says.

FROM INTERVIEWS OF *E. Aldon, J. Carreon-Lagoc, AND M. Castaños* IN BACOLOD CITY; PHOTOGRAPHS BY *E. Gasataya*

NOTE

Prawn is the common name the industry in the Philippines uses for the tiger shrimp *Penaeus monodon*. **Prawn** and **tiger shrimp** are used interchangeably in this issue.