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**Aquaculture Department**

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# Live crab - a Malaysian favorite

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### Live crab - a Malaysian favorite

Malaysia's per capita consumption of seafood is 35 kg, one of the highest in the world. Malaysians love seafood and they also enjoy dining out frequently in seafood restaurants where live mudcrab is a popular item.

Hence, it is not surprising that the country has become a flourishing market for the live crab in Southeast Asia. The Malaysian market channel for live mudcrab is given on p.9.

Mangrove mudcrab, the trade name of the species *Scylla serrata*, is known as Sri Lankan crab to local Malaysians. Although Sri Lankan supplies still dominate the market, mudcrabs are also imported from neighboring Indonesia, Vietnam, India, and Bangladesh as well as from far off sources such as Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Live mudcrabs are air-freighted from various supply sources. These are packed in knitted bamboo baskets, stacked one above another. Their pincers are tied up with straw to prevent them from damaging each other. The basket bottom is covered with polythene sheeting to avoid leakage. Mudcrabs can survive out of water for a week if kept cool and moist, especially with seawater.

The mortality rate is usually 10-15% in non-stop air freighting.

The supply of mudcrab in the producing countries is becoming less due to over-exploitation and importers constantly look for alternate sources. Apparently, the supply is never enough to meet the increasing demand for this popular seafood. Almost all seafood restaurants in Kuala Lumpur serve mudcrab.

It is difficult to quantify the market volume due to lack of statistics but certain examples might help. The biggest seafood restaurant in Kuala Lumpur located near the airport sells 20 baskets of live crab a day. Each basket contains 40 kg of crabs. This particular restaurant

caters to about 1000 customers a day during weekdays; even more people, of course, eat here during the weekends. There are hundreds of medium and small seafood restaurants in the city and surrounding areas with most of them stocking live crabs.

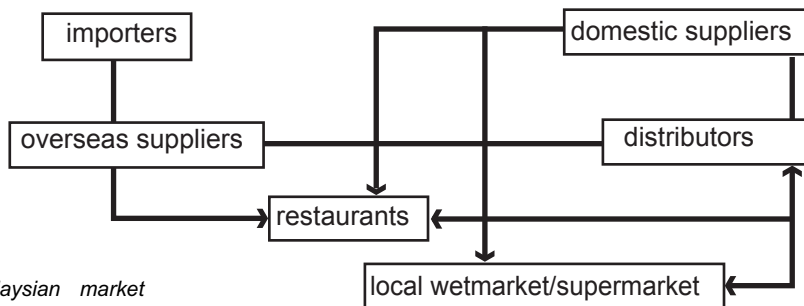
Crab sizes vary between 350 g/pc and 1 kg/pc. However, the popular size is 750 g/ piece. Popular preparations are: grilled, baked, boiled, steamed, fried in sweet/sour/hot sauces and Indian spices.

The import price for Sri Lankan crab is about MR12/kg (US\$4.40) whereas Indonesian prices range between MR4.50-7/kg (US\$1.70-2.60) depending on size and sex. Female crab with roe are more popular and expensive than the males. Vietnamese mudcrab, which are also known as green crab fetches a slightly higher price. Sizes range from 350 g to 1 kg where prices vary from US\$2.50 to 6.15/kg. The mudcrab supply increases during the new moon and tapers off during full moon.

Live mudcrabs are also sold on the local wetmarkets and supermarkets although not daily. It has always been more popular as a restaurant item than as home-cooked seafood.

Another species of live crab is also being flown in from Fiji and Papua New Guinea particularly for the local five-star hotels. This is known locally as Fijian crab. This huge creature weighs 6-8 kg/pc. Unlike mudcrab, its color is red and it looks like the coconut crab. Although the price for this species is MR35/kg (US\$13), one crab costs MR1000 (US\$370) at a five-star hotel's seafood restaurant although it can be served to 8-10 people.

Source: F. Ferdouse. 1990. *Live mud crab - a Malaysian favourite*. INFOFISH International 6/



The Malaysian market channel for live mud crab.

### Crab fattening in cages

In Pulau Ketam on the western shoreline of Peninsular Malaysia, the following were observed. Crabs were cultured in cages located amidst calm mangrove estuaries. The species reared was the mudcrab (*Scylla serrata*). Cages were no further than 10 m from mangrove shorelines, ten partly submerged cages placed alongside one another. They were suspended by nylon ropes from a floating platform. Shade for the cages was provided by thatched palm leaves overhead. One person took care of the operation.

Cages were 340-cm long, 190-cm wide, and 90-cm deep. The cages were fixed on an anchored floating platform, with approximately 25 cm of the cage above water level. Cage material consisted of inflexible plastic netting of mesh size 1.25 cm.

Small to medium size and even large 'thin' crabs (7.5-12.5 cm carapace width) with low market value were purchased from fishermen, trapped from the wild, or imported from neighboring countries and stocked into cages at 0.1/ m<sup>2</sup>. With higher stocking rates, the crabs tended to crowd together. As often as possible, crabs were regularly sorted and restocked by size.

Mortalities seem to occur among air-flown imported juveniles upon arrival and initial stocking. If adequate shelter was provided with pipes and inverted pots, mortalities at molting did not occur. Injuries sustained during fights, such as loss of limbs were evident. Obviously, optimal stocking and size segregation helped reduce mortalities caused by cannibalism.

Feed consisted of chopped trash fish, molluscs, crustaceans, and small dried fish -all 'by-catch'. Feed was placed on clay plates on the floor of cages. Cages were not cleaned as the crabs picked them clean. Occasionally, horse-shoe crabs were thrown in and were made a meal of.

Crabs were marketed live at 0.5-1.0 kg size. Claws were immobilized with rubber bands, and the crabs transported in wet burlap bags.

Mudcrabs may also be cultured in coastal earthen ponds. Being euryhaline, they are tolerant of wide changes in salinity. Fattening is preferred to culture from crab larvae, since mortalities are high in the latter case and the technology is not well established.

Source: INFOFISH International 4/90.



## Mudcrab culture in Thailand

In Thailand, mudcrab farming is carried out on a small scale compared to shrimp, fish, and bivalve farming. Due to the decline in natural populations of *Scylla serrata* and many small undersized crabs being caught, there has been considerable interest by fishermen to grow and fatten crabs. There are some 100 crab farms in Thailand.