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Lim, Chhorn

Aquaculture Department, Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center

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# **A preliminary study on the protein requirement of *Chanos chanos* (Forsk.) fry in a controlled environment**

by

**Chhorn Lim, Somchart Sukhawongs  
and**

**Felicitas Piedad Pascual**

The primary concern in fish culture is to increase fish production per unit of culture space. Supplementary feeding with artificial diets is an effective measure for increasing fish production. However, to render the production economical, supplemental diets must be formulated in accordance with the basic nutritional requirements of the particular species. There is however a dearth of studies regarding nutritional requirements for the milkfish, *Chanos chanos* (Forsk.), one of the important food fish which has been cultured in the Philippines, Indonesia and Taiwan for centuries.

Protein, being the principal diet component for growth has been the nutrient that is given priority in nutritional requirement studies. Its quality and quantity markedly affect the growth response of fishes. Its high cost also affect the economics of seafarming.

This experiment was designed to determine the optimum dietary level of protein necessary for satisfactory growth and survival of milkfish reared in a controlled environment.

Ten 60-L rectangular wooden-glass aquaria were used in this feeding study. Each aquarium had an individual air supply and was filled with approximately 30 liters of sand-gravel filtered seawater from the bay of Tigbauan. Water temperature range was 25-28°C and salinity 32-34 ppt.

Wild collected milkfish fry with an average weight of 40 mg were acclimatized for one week prior to the start of the experiment. During this period they received a diet containing 30% protein at a rate of 15% of biomass. They were randomly selected and stocked at a rate of 40 fish / aquarium.

Five semi-purified diets using casein as the protein source were prepared containing 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60% protein and 2500 Kcal of D.E./kg and fed at a rate of 10% of their biomass/day for a period of 30 days. Milkfish fry were fed twice daily and were weighed and counted every 10 days to record weight gain and survival rate. Feed allowances were adjusted every 10

days.

The growth rate of fish appeared to be related to the levels of the protein in the diet up to 40%. Fish fed the diet containing 40% protein had the highest weight gain and was significantly higher ( $P < 0.05$ ) than those receiving 20 and 30% protein in the diets. (See Figure 1). Fish fed the diets, containing 50 and 60% protein grew slower than those fed the 40% protein diet. Thus a dietary level of protein of 40% seemed to be optimum for milkfish feed fry when fed at a rate of 10% of body weight.

Feed efficiency expressed in feed conversion values (Table 2) is a reflection of the weight gain. The best feed conversion of 1.96 was obtained from the 40% protein diet. However, no statistical differences ( $P < 0.05$ ) were found among fish fed various dietary levels of protein. Nevertheless, those diets with lower or higher protein levels tended to be less efficient.

The mean survival rates were low in all treatments but was highest for the 40% protein diet. No significant difference ( $P < 0.05$ ) however was found in the survival rates of fish receiving different rations.

Results obtained from this study indicate that the optimum dietary level of protein for maximum growth of milkfish (*Chanos chanos*) fry fed 10% of biomass per day in a controlled environment is 40%. This quantity was also necessary to maintain fish against environmental stresses. Increasing the dietary levels of protein beyond 40% slightly retarded the growth rate. This could be due to the toxic effect of high protein content in the diets with insufficient non-protein energy as has been reported in channel catfish by Prather and Lovell (1973).

**Table 1. Composition of 5 isocaloric experimental diets containing various levels of protein.**

| Ingredients                           | Percentages of ingredients in diets |       |       |       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                       | 1                                   | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     |
| Casein                                | 22                                  | 33    | 44    | 55    | 66    |
| Dextrin                               | 60.4                                | 45.8  | 31.2  | 16.8  | 1.5   |
| Cod liver oil                         | 3                                   | 3     | 3     | 3     | 3     |
| Corn oil                              | 3                                   | 3     | 3     | 3     | 3     |
| C.M.C.                                | 3                                   | 3     | 3     | 3     | 3     |
| Vitamin mix <sup>1</sup>              | 3                                   | 3     | 3     | 3     | 3     |
| Mineral mix <sup>2</sup>              | 5.6                                 | 5.6   | 5.6   | 5.6   | 5.6   |
| B.H.T.                                | 0.02                                | 0.02  | 0.02  | 0.02  | 0.02  |
| Celite                                | 0                                   | 3.6   | 7.4   | 10.6  | 14.9  |
| Estimated protein (%)                 | 20                                  | 30    | 40    | 50    | 60    |
| Determined protein (%)                | 24.0                                | 31.0  | 39.1  | 48.2  | 56.9  |
| Estimated D.E. (kcal/kg) <sup>3</sup> | 2,740                               | 2,740 | 2,740 | 2,740 | 2,740 |

<sup>1</sup>Vitamin mix (mg/kg diet): Thiamine, 10; riboflavin, 20; pyridoxine, 15; folic acid, 5; pantothenic acid, 40; choline chloride, 3,000; niacin, 150; vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, 0.02; vitamin A, 4; vitamin D, 10; Vitamin E, 50; menadione-Na-bisulfite, 80; inositol, 400; biotin, 2; vitamin C, 300; B.H.T., 0.50; celite, 25,913.48.

<sup>2</sup>Mineral mix (g/kg diet): CaHPO<sub>4</sub>·2H<sub>2</sub>O, 20.7; CaCO<sub>3</sub>, 14.8; KH<sub>2</sub>PO<sub>4</sub>, 10.0; KCl, 1.0; NaCl, 6.0; MnSO<sub>4</sub>·H<sub>2</sub>O, 0.35; FeSO<sub>4</sub>·7H<sub>2</sub>O, 0.5; MgSO<sub>4</sub>, 3.0; KIO<sub>3</sub>, 0.01; CuSO<sub>4</sub>·5H<sub>2</sub>O, 0.03; ZnCO<sub>3</sub>, 0.15; CoCl<sub>2</sub>, 0.0027; NaMoO<sub>4</sub>·2H<sub>2</sub>O, 0.0083; Na<sub>2</sub>SeO<sub>3</sub>, 0.0002.

<sup>3</sup>Estimated D.E. was based on the value for channel catfish (Wilson 1977):  
 Protein: 3.5 kcal/kg  
 Fat : 8.1 kcal/kg  
 NFE : 2.5 kcal/kg

**Table II. Weight gains, diet conversions and survival rates for milkfish (*Chanos chanos*) fry fed various dietary levels of protein.<sup>1</sup>**

| Dietary levels of protein (%) | Weight gain per fish (mg) | Diet conversion   | Survival rate (%) |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 20                            | 43.3 <sup>a</sup>         | 2.46 <sup>a</sup> | 7.5 <sup>a</sup>  |
| 30                            | 65.5 <sup>a</sup>         | 2.20 <sup>a</sup> | 12.5 <sup>a</sup> |
| 40                            | 134.7 <sup>b</sup>        | 1.96 <sup>a</sup> | 30.0 <sup>a</sup> |
| 50                            | 112.3 <sup>b</sup>        | 1.99 <sup>a</sup> | 27.5 <sup>a</sup> |
| 60                            | 110.0 <sup>b</sup>        | 2.02 <sup>a</sup> | 28.8 <sup>a</sup> |

<sup>1</sup> Treatment means with the same superscript are not statistically different at P<0.05.

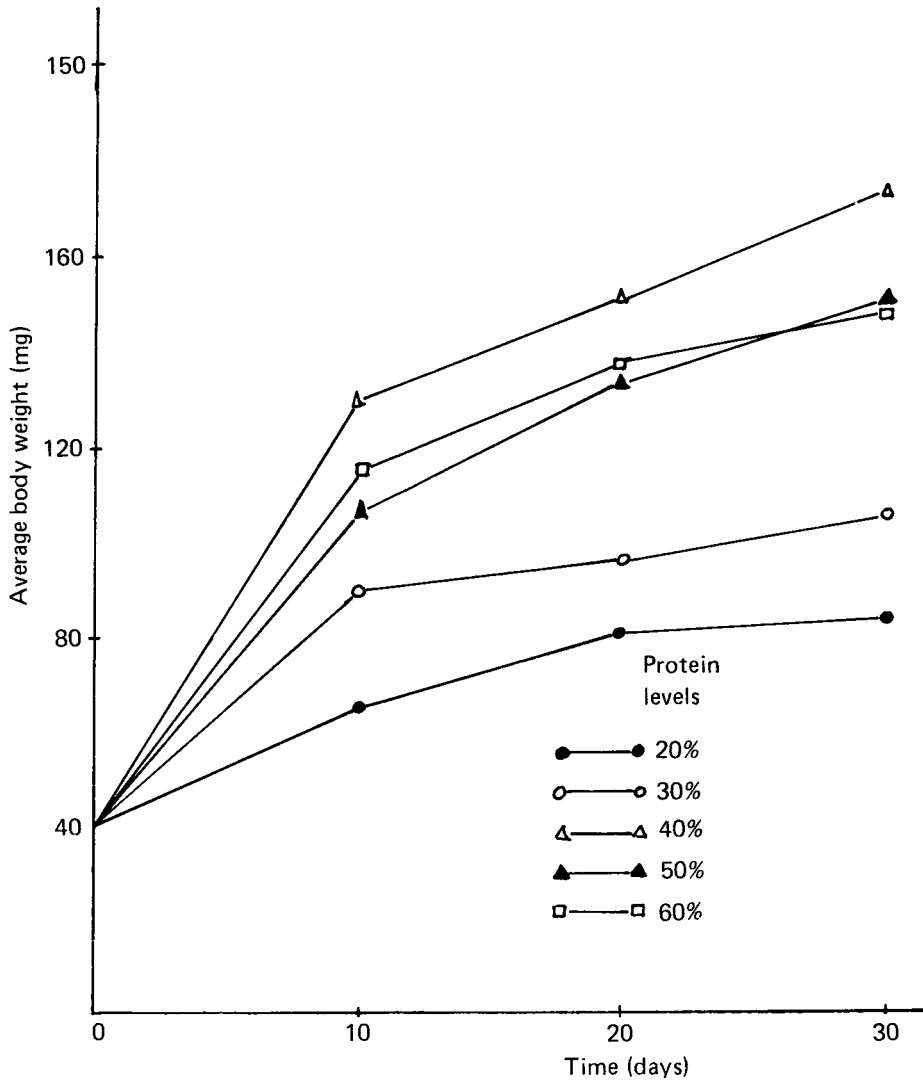
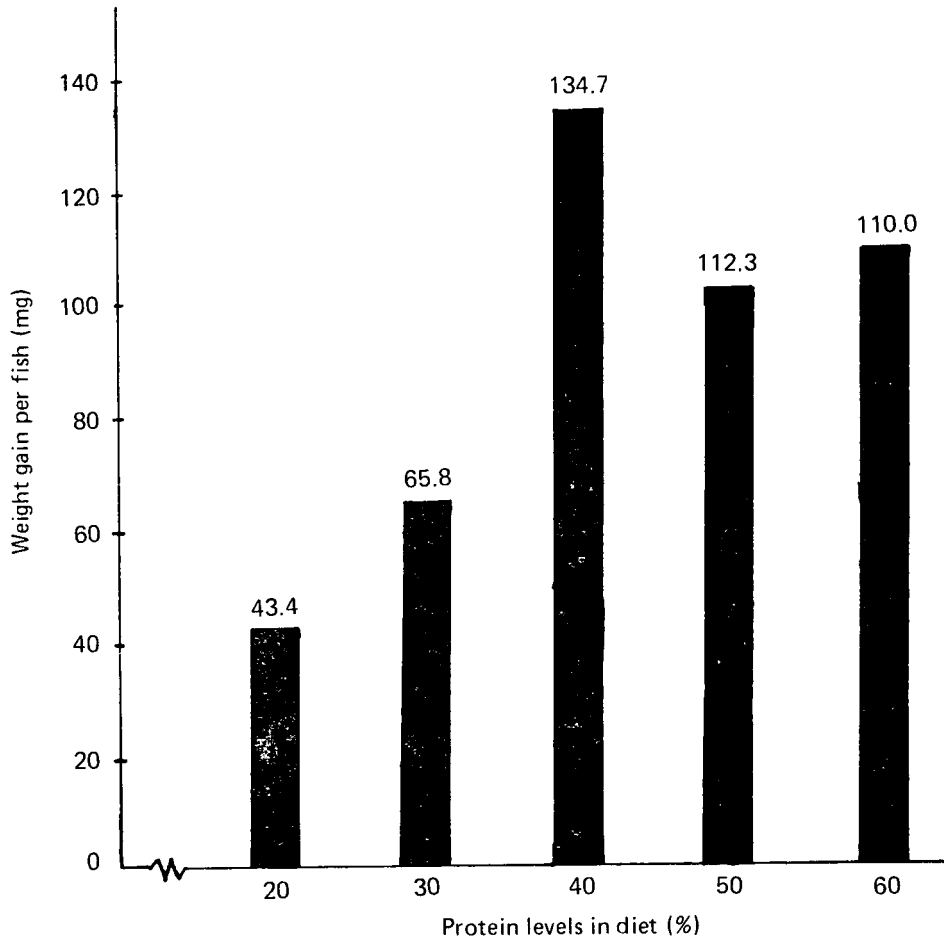


Fig. 1. Growth curve for milkfish fry fed diets containing various levels of protein.



**Fig. 2.** Relationship between weight gains of milkfish fry and the dietary levels of protein.

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