

Bighead carp grow-out in Laguna de Bay

By **AS Frio**

Dr. Alex King operates a fishpen area in the Rizal province part of Laguna de Bay.

According to Atty. Benjie Tocon, Dr. King's farm manager, they started raising milkfish and tilapia in 1983. In 1987, they introduced bighead carp in their pens. This was a polyculture system which they felt maximized their operations, especially during times when milkfish fingerlings were scarce. At that time the King farm operated a bighead carp hatchery which supplied fry and fingerlings for their grow-out operations.

Not long after however, the bighead carp hatchery industry flourished in nearby Rizal towns, particularly in Binangonan and Cardona. This was the time that some trainees who graduated from the SEAFDEC-conducted training course on hatchery operations applied their acquired knowledge and skills in a new business venture. The new entrepreneurs selling bighead carp fry and fingerlings for grow-out operators were more efficient. Soon, the King farm stopped its hatchery operation. They found that it was more economical to buy the fingerlings from the booming hatchery industry rather than raise them themselves.

Growing bighead carp is paying a lot of dividend. Atty. Tacon reports that they use 380,000 fingerlings to stock a 50-ha pen, which amounts to some 7,600 fingerlings per ha. At 85% survival rate, and an average weight of 1.75 kg per fish after 6 months of culture, they can easily get as much as 11,305 kg per ha. At the current price of USD 0.70 per kg, this yield



A portion of the fishpen growing bighead carp, tilapia and milkfish in Laguna de Bay

translates to about US\$ 7,900 (US\$1=P40) gross profit per ha.

Mr. Oscar Puzon is another avid raiser of bighead carp. He operates a fishpen in Cardona town. Of this area, he allocates 10 ha to serve as nursery for both milkfish and bighead carp.

In the mid-'80s, he took over from his father who started the business. Presently, Mr. Puzon uses a stocking rate of 5,000 pieces per ha. He believes that this rate makes for better and faster growth of the fish.

He sells his 2.5-3 kg bighead carp at US\$ 0.70 per kg to fish traders who pick up the fish from his farm. These traders earn about US\$ 0.12-0.25 per kg after selling the fish to retailers. The retailers then sell to consumers at US\$ 1.75-2.00 per kg.

Mr. Puzon cites the advantage of growing bighead carp as the lake water undergoes a certain degree of salinity variation:

"The Napindan Hydraulic Control Structure (NHCS) affects the milkfish industry. This structure is a flood control measure as flooding of lakeshore areas often occurs during the rainy season. The lake is a principal catchment area and the NHCS is closed to prevent much flooding. When the waters in the Manila Bay exceed the water level in the lake, the NHCS opens and lets saline waters into the lake. This has been perceived as beneficial to the lake fishers, especially for those who raise milkfish. However, the reverse flow

is also a boon for bighead carp since this fish grows better in freshwater."

Mr. Tiboy Reyes was one of the first batch of trainees who participated in the freshwater aquaculture course conducted by SEAFDEC in 1986. At that time, he was operating a 1.5 ha fishpen where he raised milkfish.

He bought 3,000 fingerlings from SEAFDEC and started his bighead carp culture. He operates a total of 100 ha, 40 ha of which are stocked with bighead carp.

With a stocking rate of 5,000-15,000 fingerlings per ha, he produces 4-kg fish. He sells these at US\$ 0.87 per kg in the major fish market in Navotas,

These three growers are most likely to continue with their venture. They are unanimous in saying that "unlike milkfish and tilapia, we don't need to feed them with additional commercial feed and they can thrive with natural food in the lake." Atty. Tocon emphasizes: "Even in transporting our harvest from our pens to the fish market, we don't need ice to freeze the fish and keep the bighead carp in good quality."