

## Managing Ponds For Profit

Ponds can be managed for profit by:

- **Fish farming or “aquaculture”**—raising fish to sell for human food, for stocking of other people’s ponds, or for use as fishing bait.
- **Fee-fishing pond operation**—having anglers pay to fish in ponds.

**Prospects for profit are generally poor** in Michigan for either type of operation, unless the site is exceptionally good, a large investment is made in facilities, and the operator has special training and experience. There are less than 100 fish farming operations in Michigan, and most of them are unprofitable.

Rainbow trout and, to a lesser extent, brook trout are the only fishes that grow fast enough in Michigan ponds that they can be raised for human food. However, trout can be raised much more efficiently in some other states where spring water supplies are better. It is hard for Michigan trout farmers to compete with their prices.

The situation is even worse with catfish farming which has recently become so popular in the South. While catfish grow to marketable size in one summer in the warm southern states, they need three summers to reach the same size in Michigan. Therefore, no catfish are reared for the restaurant trade in Michigan.

It is possible, however, to profitably raise certain warmwater fishes, as well as trout, to sell to pond owners for stocking. This is because prices for live fish delivered for stocking are much higher than for food market fish.

For trout farming, not only must

there be large supplies of high-quality spring water, but ponds and other facilities must be especially designed for efficient operation. Fish-farming ponds are usually built much differently than family fishing ponds. This entails enormous expense, as does paying qualified personnel. A fish farm may not begin to show a profit until 5-10 years after it is built.

To be successful, the operator has to know a great deal about fish nutrition, disease diagnosis and treatment, genetics of fish breeding, fish transport, fish processing, and fish marketing. Having a graduate fishery biologist with special training in fish culture is almost essential to compete in this business now.

Baitfish rearing isn’t done very much in Michigan anymore. Special conditions of climate and water supplies in Arkansas, Minnesota, and the Dakotas make baitfish production much more efficient there. Breeders in those states transport baitfish to Michigan dealers at prices our producers find hard to meet.

Fee-fishing ponds can use several kinds of fish, depending largely on pond temperature, kinds of fish available from suppliers, and what kinds of fish the customers like to fish for. In most areas, trout are the most popular and the easiest to obtain and manage. Some fee-fishing operations raise their own fish, but most stock with fish bought from fish farmers. It is best to be located near a large population center, in a popular tourist area, or on busy travel routes.

In the case of either fish raising or fee-fishery operation, there are often water quality problems caused

