Current Status of Federal Involvement in U.S. Aquaculture

September 1995
As U.S. capture fisheries are declining, interest in aquaculture is again growing. Private, commercial aquaculture—the production of aquatic organisms (finfish, shellfish, and plants) by one or more individuals or corporate bodies that have owned them through all or part of their rearing period—is being considered for its potential to provide employment and income to declining coastal and rural communities, to help improve the U.S. balance of trade, and to provide consumers with a plentiful, safe, and nutritious protein source.

The United States lacks a strong national aquaculture policy and supporting federal presence. Over the years, levels and foci of agency involvement in aquaculture development have shifted in response to legislation and its differing interpretations. The National Aquaculture Act (NAA), the primary piece of aquaculture-related legislation, is slated for reauthorization in 1995 as part of the Farm Bill. One issue that underlies reconsideration of the NAA and related legislation is the federal role in research and regulation of this emerging industry.

Congress requested this Background Paper to provide information on technology issues of immediate importance to the U.S. aquaculture industry. This is a companion piece to the Background Paper on Selected Technology Issues in U.S. Aquaculture. Committees requesting the assessment were the House Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries (since disbanded), the House Committee on Agriculture and its Subcommittee on Livestock, and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs.

OTA greatly appreciates the contributions of the Advisory Panel, authors of contracted papers, workshop participants, federal liaisons, and the many additional people who reviewed material for the report or gave valuable guidance. Their timely and in-depth assistance allowed us to explore some of the complex issues related to the federal role in aquaculture. As with all OTA studies, the content of this report is solely the responsibility of OTA.

ROGER C. HERDMAN
Director
Advisory Panel

Jan Auyong, Chair
Mar Res Associates
Hatfield Marine Science Center
Newport, OR

Don Abt
Laboratory for Marine Animal Health
University of Pennsylvania
State College, PA

John Bardach
Office of Research and Education
East-West Center
Honolulu, HI

Merry Camhi
National Audubon Society
Islip, NY

John S. Corbin
Aquaculture Development Program
Honolulu, HI

Mike Freeze
Keo Fish Farm, Inc.
Keo, AR

Michael Hastings
Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center
Brewer, ME

Timothy K. Hennessy
Ekk Will Waterlife Resources
Gibsonton, FL

Bille Hougart
Oceanic Institute
Washington, DC

Robert Hulbrock
Department of Fish and Game
Sacramento, CA

Ann Kapuscinski
Sea Grant College Program
University of Minnesota
St. Paul, MN

Roy Martin
National Fisheries Institute
Arlington, VA

Joseph McCraren
National Aquaculture Association
Shepherdstown, WV

Ted McNulty
Arkansas Development Finance Authority
Little Rock, AR

David Ortman
Friends of the Earth
Seattle, WA

John Pitts
Bellwether Consulting
Quilcene, WA

Bradley H. Powers
National Association of State Aquaculture Coordinators
Annapolis, MD

Robert R. Stickney
School of Fisheries
University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Hugh Warren III
Catfish Farmers of America
Indianola, MS

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Project Staff

Clyde Behney  
Assistant Director

Cameron Proffitt Taylor  
Principal Author

Robert N. Niblock  
Program Director  
Environment Program

Alison L. Hess  
Senior Associate

Robin A. White  
Senior Analyst

Richard M. Carr  
Analyst

Susan J. Wunder  
Contract Editor/Writer

ADMINISTATIVE STAFF

Kathleen Beil  
Office Administrator

Nellie Hammond  
Administrative Secretary

Kimberly Holmlund  
Administrative Secretary

Babette Polzer  
Contractor
INNOVATIVE FUTURES FOR U.S. AQUACULTURE  
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Editor/Writer: Susan Wunder

Gary Arnold  
Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center  
Brewer, ME

Doug Burdette  
Maryland Pride Farms  
Aberdeen, MD

Peter Cook  
Science and Technology Group  
EPCOT Center, FL

John P. Craven  
Common Heritage

Michael Dicks  
Department of Agricultural Economics  
Oklahoma State University, OK

Ron Gulau  
Florida Aquaculture  
Punta Gorda, FL

Tom Hopkins  
Maryland Aquaculture Association  
Boys, MD

Bo Kjaer-Olsen  
International Aquafarms, Inc.  
Hauula, HI

Cal Sims  
Edisto Aquatic Farms  
Orangeburg, SC

OFFSHORE AQUACULTURE  
November, 1993

Writer/Editor: Susan Wunder

Robert Stickney  
School of Fisheries  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA

Bob Blumberg  
Texas General Land Office  
Austin, Texas

John Forster  
Stolt Sea Farm, Inc.  
Port Angeles, WA

Harlyn Halvorson  
Policy Center For Marine Bioscience and Technology

University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth  
North Dartmouth, MA
James P. McVey
National Sea Grant College Program
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Silver Spring, MD

Russell Miget
Texas A&M Sea Grant College Program
Corpus Christi, TX

Granvil Treece
Texas A&M Sea Grant College Program
Bryan, TX

Robert Wilder
Center For Policy Analysis
University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth
North Dartmouth, MA