

Catfish Research in Virginia

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S-83 Report Catfish Research In Virginia

Editor's Note: Catfish research at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University at Blacksburg, Virginia is part of the 12-state S-83 Project. The authors of this report, Vaughn M. Douglass and Robert T. Lackey are connected with VPI's Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences.

By **VAUGHN M. DOUGLASS**
And **ROBERT T. LACKEY**

S-83 research efforts in Virginia have been directed toward providing the necessary technical information for establishment of a channel catfish industry in the state.

In certain regions of Virginia — where tobacco is the only cash crop — farmers could use catfish farming as supplemental income.

Utilization of irrigation ponds, found on most of these small tobacco farms, would minimize necessary capital outlay and result in greater net profit to the farmer.

Intensive study on channel catfish farming began in 1968 — with the research being done by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, in cooperation with the Pittsylvania County Community Action of Chatham Virginia.

Completed studies now include a pond suitability survey; three years of experimental culture, and preliminary economics analysis. Currently, channel catfish from different regions of the United States are being tested to determine which will give the best growth in the relatively cool waters encountered in much of Virginia.

Pond Suitability

This phase of our research provided an estimate of the number of suitable ponds available for catfish culture in South Central Virginia. A simple pond rating form was developed that would allow a farmer or county agent to determine if a pond is suitable for catfish culture. The interest expressed by pond owners regarding catfish farming was found to be quite high.

Experimental Culture

The biological feasibility of channel catfish production was explored during three growing seasons (1970, 1971 and 1972) to compare pond and cage culture. Growth rates of channel catfish in various areas, and the minimum stocking size necessary to produce marketable fish in Virginia were determined.

Currently, we are cultivating catfish from various regions of the United States to decide if there is a significant difference in growth rates. This segment of our research will enable the farmer to acquire a fingerling that will attain a marketable size in a shorter growing

season.


Economic Analysis

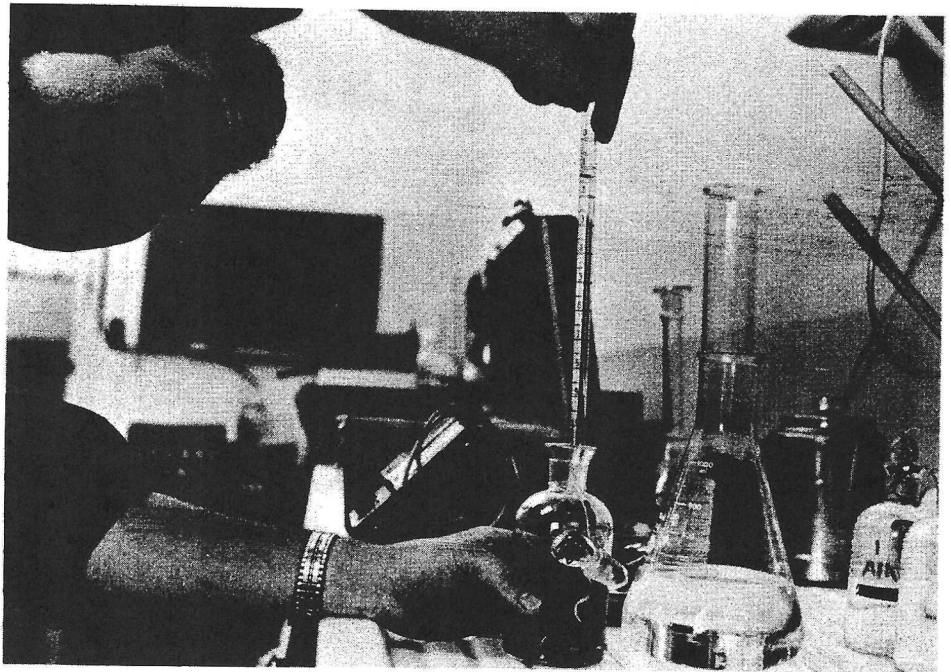
This phase of our research deals with a preliminary evaluation of the economic potential of channel catfish production in Virginia. The extent of the potential demand for catfish in Virginia and the Washington area, the cost of producing

channel catfish and the profit possibilities, distribution, feasibility and preferred type of product are being determined.

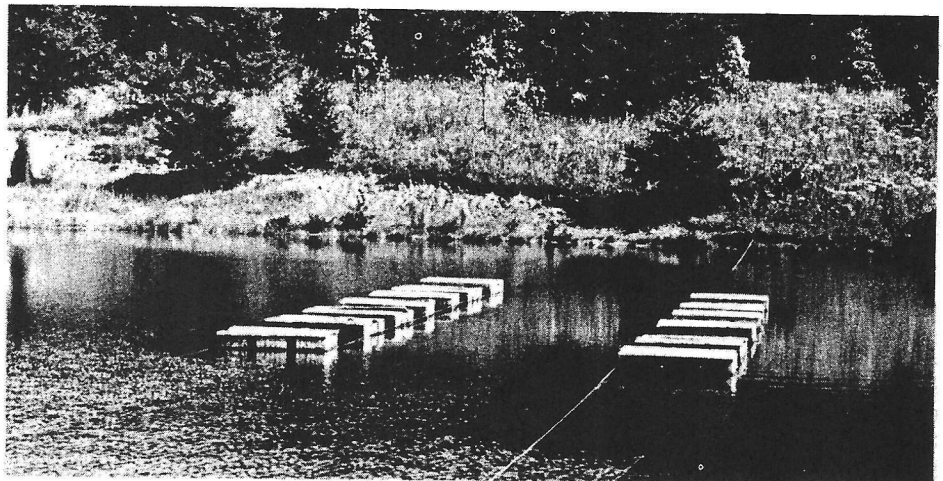
Future Studies

Channel catfish soon will be grown in additional areas of Virginia to determine which locations might best support catfish operations. Further work will be done in locating processors and promoting the industry.

In addition, distribution costs and the formation of a farmer's cooperative which could coordinate channel catfish production with current market situations will be investigated. 



Many of Virginia's ponds have been surveyed to determine their potential for catfish culture. Runoff from fertilized cropland is a problem in many ponds.



Experimental cage culture is being researched in Virginia to compare strains of channel catfish.