

# Focus On Fish Health

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From the trout on your menu to the pet goldfish supplied to your local pet store, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) plays a large role in maintaining the health of U.S. farmed fish populations.

## What is Aquaculture?

Aquaculture is the farming and harvesting of marine and freshwater aquatic animals and plants. This includes fish and shellfish for human consumption, sportfish and baitfish for commercial and recreational fishing, and ornamental fish for the hobbyists, researchers, and public aquariums. It even includes raising fish for release to enhance wild populations.

It is a diverse and innovative industry. Shellfish (oysters, clams, and mussels) and some fish (salmon, flounder, and cobia) are raised in bays and the open ocean; while catfish, tilapia, bass, shrimp, crawfish, baitfish, and ornamental fish are raised in ponds or tanks. Other species like trout require high oxygen levels and are often raised in flow-through raceways.

## The Importance of Aquaculture

Aquaculture is one of the fastest growing forms of food production in the world, and it is becoming widely recognized as an effective way to meet the seafood demands of a growing population. In 2008, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported that aquaculture production for human consumption accounted for 46 percent of the world's seafood and that production is set to overtake capture of fish from the wild.

In the United States, the aquaculture industry is diverse and growing; it includes production of a variety of fish, crustaceans (including shrimp and crawfish), shellfish, and plants. There are five principal aquaculture fish species in the United States (catfish, trout, salmon, tilapia, and hybrid striped bass) and two categories of non-food fish production (baitfish and ornamental fish).

Today, U.S. aquaculture is valued at \$1 billion, and the demand for seafood continues to increase domestically. The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*—jointly published by USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—recommends individuals increase their intake of seafood from 3.5 ounces to 8 or more ounces per week.

As the United States further develops its sustainable aquaculture industry to keep pace with the increasing demand for seafood, the need for responsible farming—including preventive aquatic animal health practices—will be vital.

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## **APHIS' Role in Aquaculture**

APHIS is the country's lead agency for the protection of aquatic animal health. APHIS conducts activities for the prevention, detection, control, and eradication of diseases and pests of livestock, including farmed aquatic animals, under the authority of the Animal Health Protection Act of 2002. Activities such as biosecurity, veterinary support, and disease surveillance are all preventive measures that help protect the aquaculture industry from the impact of potential disease outbreaks.

## **Part of the Team**

APHIS collaborates with the aquaculture industry, State agriculture and natural resource agencies, tribes, veterinary practitioners, and other stakeholders to develop policy and best practices to address the aquatic animal health needs in the United States. Ultimately, the shared goal is to ensure the health of our Nation's farmed aquatic animals and to facilitate the trade both internationally and interstate.

As part of its efforts, APHIS is also a member of the United States Joint Subcommittee on Aquaculture (JSA), which serves as the Federal interagency coordinating group to increase the overall effectiveness and productivity of Federal aquaculture research, technology transfer, and assistance programs. In response to several disease outbreaks in the United States and abroad, the JSA oversaw the drafting of the National Aquatic Animal Health Plan (NAAHP). The NAAHP provides government agencies with guidelines and general principles for protecting aquatic animal health in the United States.

APHIS provides a wide range of services to the aquaculture community, including:

- Laboratory diagnostic and testing capacity
- Vaccine development
- Epidemiology and risk assessment expertise
- Disease surveillance
- Outbreak response and investigation
- Import and export assistance and certification
- Assistance in managing wildlife interactions

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