



NAHMS Catfish '97 Study Objectives

The catfish industry is thriving in the United States and the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) wants to help it continue to grow.

While raising catfish is a relatively new domestic animal industry, the U.S. industry has grown steadily during its existence. In 1992, the U.S. produced 207,460 metric tons of catfish product from 2,155 farms, which was a 233 percent increase over the number of farms in existence a decade before.

In 1995, the USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) began to explore how the program could contribute to catfish farmers' successes. The program's charge is to provide information to fill gaps in knowledge of animal agriculture. NAHMS first reviewed existing literature and gathered information from previous studies of the catfish and other aquaculture industries. To further define where information was lacking, NAHMS staff developed extensive contacts in the catfish industry. Visits with farmers, researchers, diagnosticians, and policy makers helped NAHMS identify the industry's highest priority information needs.

The NAHMS Catfish '97 study will address many questions brought up during the needs assessment phase. **Catfish '97 will focus on operations in Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Louisiana during the National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) quarterly contacts.**

NAHMS questions will be added to NASS' regular January telephone survey, a data collection method

selected to minimize USDA expenses and time burdens to participating producers. A subset of the January participants will be asked additional questions during April NASS contacts.

The Catfish '97 contacts will concentrate on two areas: pond and herd health management:

- **General Management Practices:** Ideal management practices may exist, but under changing conditions on the farm, operators must be flexible to adapt their practices to meet both biological and marketing constraints. The NAHMS Catfish '97 study will explore a range of practices including feeding, stocking, harvesting, fingerling purchase/production, and aeration.

- **Herd Health Management/Quality Assurance:** Ponds are ideally suited to management on the herd level rather than on an individual animal level. Disease prevention and treatment must be attempted at pond level and, potentially, at the whole farm level. The Catfish '97 study would describe health management practices such as water quality monitoring (frequency, variables monitored, etc.), vaccination and responses to disease outbreaks. Potentially, the feasibility of using water quality data to predict disease outbreaks can be investigated. Existing sources of water quality monitoring can be applied, and there is potential for developing a pilot on-farm monitoring project in Mississippi.

In addition to the survey of catfish farmers in the southeast, NAHMS plans to fill other information needs expressed during the needs assessment activities through methods such as analyses of existing data bases and collaboration with university researchers.