

## Highlights of NAHMS Catfish 2003: Part II

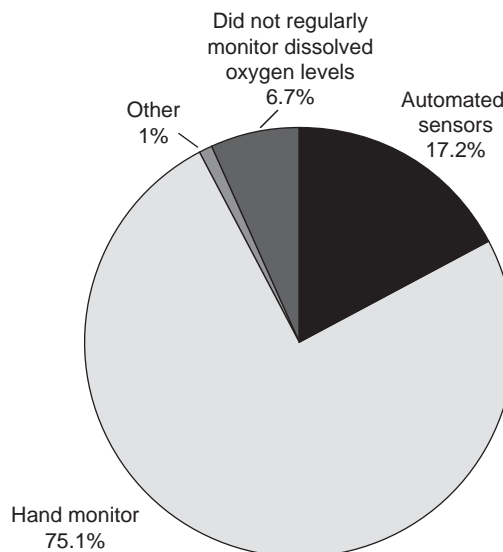
The USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted its second national study of the catfish industry in cooperation with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). Data were collected on catfish production practices in four States (Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) as part of the National Animal Health Monitoring System's (NAHMS) Catfish 2003 study. These four States represented the nation's major catfish producing States, accounting for: 73.4 percent of all U.S. catfish operations on January 1, 2003; 95.5 percent of the total national catfish sales in 2002; and 95.5 percent of the water surface acres to be used for catfish production from January 1 through June 30, 2003. There were 739 respondents to the catfish questionnaire in the four participating States (Alabama = 223, Arkansas = 157, Louisiana = 67, Mississippi = 292) with an overall response rate of 79.0 percent.

The following highlights were excerpted from the report released in November 2003: Catfish 2003 Part II: Reference of Foodsize Catfish Health and Production Practices in the United States, 2003.

- Operations in the West region\* were larger in terms of both average number of foodsize fish ponds (25.3) and average total surface acres (290.2 acres) than operations in the East region, which averaged 13.0 ponds and 130.9 total surface acres. Average pond size was 11.0 surface acres.
- Well water was used for 98.9 percent of all foodsize ponds in the West region, while the majority of ponds (67.5 percent) in the East region were filled using surface water.
- In both regions, the majority of ponds averaged 4 to 5 feet in depth. A higher percentage of operations in the East region than the West region had ponds with average water depths greater than 5 feet (36.3 and 8.0 percent of operations, respectively).

- Dissolved oxygen levels were hand monitored on most operations (75.1 percent, Figure 1). Automated sensors were used by 17.2 percent of operations. A relatively high percentage of operations (39.0 percent) with less than 20 surface acres did not regularly monitor dissolved oxygen.

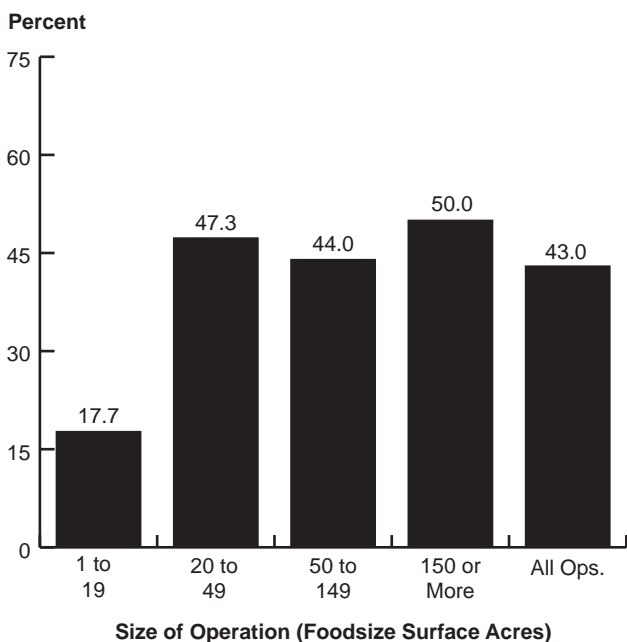
**Figure 1. Percentage of Foodsize Fish Operations by Primary Method Used for Monitoring Dissolved Oxygen in Foodsize Fish Ponds During 2002**



- A lower percentage of operations with less than 20 acres (17.7 percent) tested water quality at least once a month than did operations with 20 or more acres. Almost half (48.5 percent) of small operations (1 to 19 acres) never tested water quality (Figure 2).

**\*Regions:**  
**East:** Alabama, Eastern Mississippi  
**West:** Arkansas, Louisiana, Western Mississippi

**Figure 2. Percent of Foodsize Fish Operations that Tested Water Quality in Foodsize Fish Ponds Once a Month or More Often, by Size of Operation**



- The most important criterion for selecting fingerlings or stockers for stocking was producer's reputation (34.3 percent of operations), followed by price (29.3 percent of operations), and growth characteristics (14.0 percent of operations). Distance from supplier was rarely the most important criterion (0.7 percent of operations).
- The operation average stocking rate was 5,752 fingerlings per acre. The average stocking rates ranged from 4,296 fingerlings per acre on small operations to 6,053 fingerlings per acre on the largest operations.
- Multibatch harvested fish represented the highest percentage of fish harvested (88.0 percent). Single-batch harvested fish represented a much smaller percentage (11.7 percent) of the harvest (Table 1).

**Table 1. Percentage of pounds of fish harvested, by production practice:**

Production Practice	Percent
Multibatch	88.0
Single batch	11.7
Other (including cage)	0.3
Total	100.0

- The three most prevalent diseases reported were: enteric septicemia of catfish (60.6 percent of operations); columnaris (50.4 percent of operations); and winter kill (32.9 percent of operations). With the exceptions of ich, proliferative gill disease, and trematodes, the percentage of operations with disease problems increased as operation size increased.
- During 2002, off-flavor problems delayed harvest on 69.6 percent of all operations and 53.3 percent of all ponds on operations where foodsize fish were harvested. The percentage of operations with delays due to off-flavor increased as operation size increased.

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