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Title: Tilapia markets in the Americas, 2001 and beyond

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Abstract: The total market for tilapia in the Americas was almost 300,000 metric tons of live weight fish in 2000. Production in the Americas was approximately 257,000 mt and the US imported fillets and frozen tilapia representing more than 30,000 mt of harvested fish from Eastern Hemisphere producers. Expanding demand sufficiently to absorb the rapidly expanding supply has become a critical task to support the current prices for tilapia products.

During the 1980's and 90's several different seafood publications declared tilapia to be the "new fish of the year". Since then tilapia has become one of the more popular seafood entrees in the Americas. As high quality tilapia products began to appear, its recognition as a quality seafood product has increased from Canada to Chile. Tilapia are not truly a new product in the Americas. Mossambique Tilapia, *Oreochromis mossambicus* were first introduced to the Caribbean by C.F. Hickling in 1947. They were quickly introduced throughout Central and South America. *O. aureus*, *O. niloticus* and several hybrid red strains were introduced in the 1960's and 1970's.

Mexico currently produces and consumes (\approx 100,000 mt) more tilapia than any other country in the Americas. The US is the next biggest consumer ($>$ 90,000 mt) but just a minor producer ($<$ 9,000 mt). Brazil and Cuba are the next largest producers/consumers. Costa Rica, Honduras, Ecuador, and Jamaica are the major exporting countries. Each has a well-developed infrastructure of production, processing and export, with Honduras being the most recent. Each of these exporting countries has some domestic consumption, but the relatively small population base and high level of investment required for large-scale production has driven them to look toward US and European markets.

As supply continues to expand, consumer demand must also increase. "Push" and "pull" strategies are used by marketers to increase demand. Examples of these techniques are

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described as well as advertising and sales tools. One example of the efforts made by some producers to increase demand was the creation of a marketing entity. Several of the largest tilapia producers and importers/exporters to the U.S. have jointly funded the Tilapia Marketing Institute (TMI). The TMI has begun a broad ranging program to increase U.S. demand for tilapia products. The Institute is pursuing a generic campaign to increase demand for all product forms of tilapia.

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