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Sustainable Aquaculture for a Secure Future

Title: Marketing and Economics

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Abstract: The economic history of the development of the tilapia industry world-wide is a fascinating study of a fish enterprise that has been managed successfully on nearly every scale of business. This by no means implies that all attempts to raise tilapia have been successful, but rather that examples of successful tilapia enterprises can be found over a wide range of sizes, scales, and business organization.

In 2002, tilapia were being grown and sold in 81 different countries, on every major continent, and in tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates. Tilapia are produced by near-subsistence farmers as a savings account for hard times; caught and consumed by subsistence fishermen; raised and sold to local village markets and upscale domestic markets; exported to high-end sales outlets in the United States, Japan, and Europe; and raised by hobby farmers in the United States and Europe. Tilapia are positioned, often in the same countries, as low-priced products for the poor; as ethnic products; and as gourmet, luxury, upscale products for white tablecloth restaurants. Tilapia are raised in virtually all conceivable types of production systems and in both fresh and saltwater. Regardless of an individual's particular perspective, the tilapia are undoubtedly the most ubiquitous, the most successful, and the most adaptable aquaculture species in the world.

This chapter explores the development of tilapia markets, from the early markets that were developed for wild-caught tilapia, home consumption of farmed tilapia, sales to local markets and upscale domestic markets, and export marketing. Issues and challenges related to these various targeted markets are discussed. The costs of producing tilapia on a variety of scales of production and in different production systems are also examined.

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