

CATFISH FARMING: Is It For You?

ANR 273 Revised 2008. Jesse A. Chappell. Extension Fisheries Specialist, Assistant Professor, Auburn University

Like other forms of agriculture, catfish farming can be a profitable farm enterprise. However, commercial catfish production involves substantial capital investment, personal commitment and many risks. Growing catfish successfully also requires daily attention to achieve production levels necessary for maximizing profitability. If you're considering catfish farming, this checklist can help guide you in determining whether a catfish enterprise is feasible or desirable for your particular business situation. The checklist is a guide and doesn't cover *all* possibilities or risks. Answering yes to most questions won't guarantee success, just as answering no won't mean automatic failure. The checklist does list many of the most important considerations. However, to maximize your probability of success, most of your answers should be in the yes column before you begin developing a commercial catfish operation. Your county Extension office can direct you to extension specialists and additional information resources for the more technical questions.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

MANAGEMENT

- | | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 1. Do you already have suitable ponds or a site suitable for pond development? | _____ | _____ |
| 2. Do you have most of the machinery and equipment needed to operate the enterprise? | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Do you have the necessary financial resources or the ability to borrow the necessary funds? | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Is the catfish enterprise profit potential higher than that of other possible investments or business opportunities? | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Will a conservative profit expectation be adequate compensation for your labor, management, and risk? | _____ | _____ |
| 6. Will investment and operating capital interest rates permit a reasonable profit 80% of the time? | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Is the catfish production enterprise the best alternative for the land and capital you intend to use? | _____ | _____ |
| 8. Can you afford to forego income- usually a lapse of at least 15 months- until you sell your first crop? | _____ | _____ |
| 9. Does your business plan allow you to absorb occasional losses? | _____ | _____ |
| 10. Are you willing to devote the daily time and effort required to make the enterprise successful? | _____ | _____ |

MARKETING

Yes *No*

1. Do you know established markets for your fish to processors or live fish buyers? _____
2. Is there a year round market for your fish or at least at the time of year you plan to sell them? _____
3. Do you have a reliable, cost effective arrangement for harvesting and transporting your fish? _____
4. Can you be flexible and harvest fish during the cool weather months season? _____
5. Do you have alternative marketing strategies in the event your primary market falters or is slow to purchase your fish? _____

PHYSICAL FACTORS

1. Does the topography of the land lend itself to cost effective commercial pond construction? _____
2. Will the soil hold water with minimal seepage? _____
3. Is enough water available from rainfall or wells to fill the pond(s) and replace losses for evaporation and seepage? _____
4. Is your water of the proper quality and chemistry for competitive catfish production? _____
5. Is the pond area protected from flooding or excessive run-off after a heavy rain event? _____
6. Are the drains in existing ponds adequately large to allow rapid draining? _____
7. Can wild fish be prevented from entering the pond? _____
8. Is there year-round access to the pond for harvesting, feeding and access for managing the production pond ? _____
9. Is the pond bottom smooth and stump-free to allow efficient seine-through harvesting? _____
10. Is your residence close enough to the pond(s) to allow reasonable security as well as frequent and timely observations and the necessary management adjustments? _____

PRODUCTION FACTORS

1. Are good quality feeds readily available at a commercially competitive price? _____
2. Do you have a local source of supply for the therapeutants and chemicals that may be needed? _____
3. Are fingerlings or stockers available from local producers or dealers? _____
4. Could you raise your own fingerlings or stockers? _____
5. Can you make or purchase reliable, electrically driven aeration equipment? _____
6. Do you have a dependable labor resource? _____
7. Are dependable parasite and disease diagnostic services available? _____
8. Do you have equipment for storing feed in bulk? _____

9. Are you aware of the extension system, university, governmental agencies and trade associations that can provide you educational and technical services?

RISKS

Are you equipped or have the skills to handle the following problems:

Yes

No

1. Poor water quality including low dissolved oxygen, high carbon dioxide, elevate nitrite, high ammonia?

2. Off-flavors?

3. Pesticide contamination?

4. Poachers and vandals?

5. Personal stress resulting from intense farm and enterprise risk management?
