



Harvesting catfish at a commercial farm in Hale County

US farm-raised catfish is among the top 10 seafoods consumed in the United States. It is a healthy and sustainable food option that contributes nearly \$2 billion to the US economy and directly supports more than 4,000 jobs.

In 2023, the US farm-raised catfish industry produced 327.8 million pounds of catfish from 55,855 acres of water. Alabama, the second largest producer of US farmed-raised catfish, produced 29 percent of this—equivalent to 96.2 million pounds and worth \$112.6 million (figure 1).

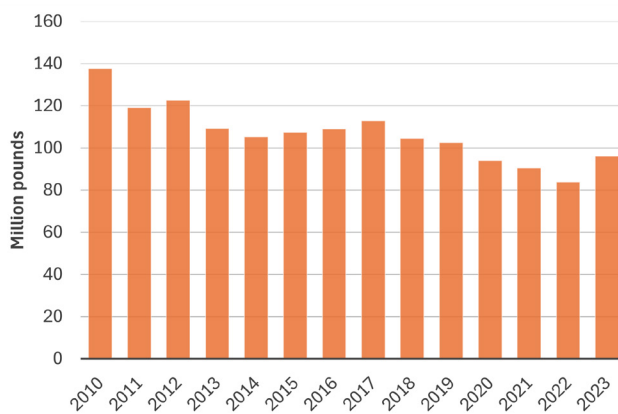


Figure 1. Food-size catfish sales in Alabama, 2010–2023 (Source: USDA NASS).

Catfish is Alabama’s eighth largest agricultural crop and the leading agricultural crop for several counties in the Blackbelt region. In 2022, Alabama had 89 farms spanning 14,100 water acres located primarily in Hale, Dallas, and Greene Counties (figure 2). Hale County is the largest catfish-producing county, accounting for more than a third of Alabama’s catfish sales (table 1). Catfish also account for more than half of the total agricultural sales in Hale County. In Greene County—the third largest catfish-producing county—catfish sales accounted for 75 percent of total agricultural sales.

Industry Challenges

- Market:** Demand for catfish and many other seafood products has slowed as consumers cut back on seafood spending due to inflation. This resulted in high frozen inventories in 2023, which put downward pressure on prices. Federal government purchases through USDA programs provided some relief to the US catfish industry, with purchases exceeding 14 million pounds in 2023. Pangasius imports were also down by more than 30 percent in 2023.
- Fish Size:** Farmers had fewer fish in the water in 2023, but the overall weight of fish was up, suggesting that farmers were leaving fish in the water longer than usual. The average price of premium size catfish was \$1.24 per pound. Size categories larger than the premium size received discounts between \$0.12 and \$1.10 per pound. Ten percent of processed fish were oversized, totaling a loss of nearly \$7 million to the industry.
- Feed Price:** In 2023, the average feed price was \$532/ton and \$563/ton for 28 percent and 32 percent crude protein feeds, respectively. This represents a 45 to 50 percent increase in the price of feed over the last three years.
- Labor:** Labor shortages have created interruptions in catfish supply chains and have caused delays in processing. Similar to other agricultural industries, the catfish industry is turning to the federal H-2A visa program to help solve labor shortages.

The Blackbelt region also has two processing plants located in Eutaw and Uniontown, and two feed mills located in Demopolis and Uniontown.

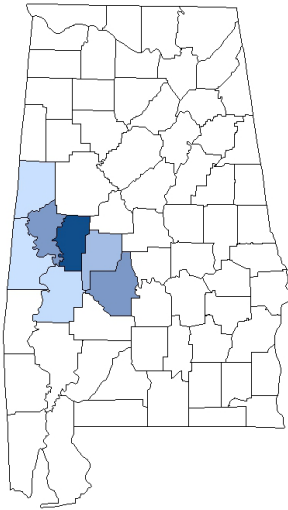


Figure 2. Acreage devoted to catfish farming in Alabama, 2022.

Table 1. Catfish Farms and Sales by County, 2022

County	Number of Operations	Catfish Sales (\$1,000)	Share of County Agricultural Sales
Hale	20	36,499	54%
Dallas	6	22,625	29%
Greene	11	21,360	75%
Perry	12	10,122	24%
Sumter	3	3,264	16%
Marengo	8	3,148	11%
Others	29	3,553	<1%
Total	89	100,571	1%

(Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture).

¹ National Fisheries Institute. (2023). Top 10 List.

² Hegde, S., Kumar, G., Engle, C., Hanson, T., Roy, L.A., van Senten, J., Avery, J., Aarattuthodi, S., Dahl, S., Dorman, L., Peterman, M. (2022). Economic contribution of the U.S. catfish industry. *Aquaculture Economics & Management*, 26(4), 384-413.



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