

Buying or Producing Your Own Fingerlings?

Bill Lynch
President
Ohio Aquaculture Association



Key Considerations

- Culture System Used
- Species Grown
- Number Required
- Availability
- Fingerling Price if Purchased
- Cost to Produce Your Own
- Your Level of Expertise

Species Grown

- Some species feed train very easily, others take more effort and expertise.
- Tilapia, koi, and bluegill are easy.
- Yellow perch require some finesse.
- Largemouth bass are difficult at this point.



Culture System Used

● Pond Culture

- Generally produce their own fingerlings.
- Newly hatched fry of many species need time in a fertilized pond prior to feed training.

● Recirculating Aquaculture System

- Typically buy feed trained fingerlings, although . . .
- Some species can eat artificial feed immediately.

● Aquaponics

- Nearly all are purchasing feed trained fingerlings due to small system sizes.

Number Required

- At the extremes, decision is fairly easy.
- If need is less than 1000 feed trained fingerlings, probably best to purchase.
- 10,000+ fingerlings probably invites serious consideration of producing your own.
- In between, decision is based on all the other factors we will consider.



Figure 1. Aerial view of new ponds.

Availability

- Are feed trained fingerlings readily available when you need them?
 - If not, you may need to produce your own.
- Tilapia and koi are generally available year round.
- Bluegill, largemouth bass, and yellow perch tend to be available seasonally – often spring only.
 - Most are pond produced, often not available in winter due to ice and summer due to excessive heat.

Fingerling Price if Purchased

- What is the Actual Cost?
 - Wholesale?
 - No operation can afford retail price!
- Remember, you are paying the profit margin of the fingerling producer.
- Cost differs by size.
 - What size do you really need?
- Feed trained or non-feed trained – could feed train them yourself.

Cost to Produce Your Own

- Production of fry for feed training and their feed training requires infrastructure which costs money.
 - Ponds, tanks, pumps, seine
 - Varies by species
- Need to gather cost data and develop an enterprise budget for producing your own feed trained fingerlings.
- Review estimated cost per fingerling you produce versus what is costs to purchase that same size fingerling.

Your Level of Expertise

- Do you have the knowledge necessary to produce and handle fry?
- Are there resources / contacts available to help you navigate the delicate world of working with fish fry?
- Keep in mind, it often take years to gain this expertise. Can your operation survive if there are problems?
- Maybe gently transition to your own fingerling production.

Final Thoughts

- Producing your own feed trained fingerlings can be cost effective, but can vary among operations.
- As discussed, many factors influence a decision to produce your own feed trained fingerlings.
- In general, aquaponics and small, beginning traditional aquaculture operations are better served purchasing feed trained fingerlings.
- Larger operations should seriously consider producing their own fingerlings.

Questions