



Marketing Farmed Fish in Ohio

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Marketing your product should be fully explored before getting into fish farming, but that is not always the case. It is expensive to raise fish in Ohio, so you end up with an expensive product to sell. It is difficult to compete with imported seafood on price, but customers may be willing to pay more for a top quality, locally raised product. In that spirit, here are some ideas about how to sell your farmed fish.

Live or whole on ice

An Ohio Aquaculture Permit (Ohio Department of Natural Resources) allows you to sell your fish live or whole on ice. In this case, ice is seen as part of the harvesting process enabling you to keep your product fresh. For example, if you are selling 500 pounds of bluegill to a fish processor, you can transport the fish to the processor or other customer either live in water, or whole on ice. The client may give specific instructions as to how they prefer the fish to be delivered.

The ice can be flake, cubed, slush, cracked, or chipped. Some prefer a slurry/slush with a citric based additive. Flaked is best when packing in a 50 or 60 pound capacity waxed box. Some processors recommend 10 pounds of ice on the bottom of the box, 30 pounds of fish, and then up to 20 pounds of ice on top. Farmers often use an insulated fish tote for larger amounts of fish. The tote is typically layered with 100 pounds of ice on the bottom, 300 pounds fish, 150 pounds ice, 300 pounds of fish and 150 pounds of ice on top. It is important to maintain the fish flesh temperature under 41°F.

Selling to a processor

There are some additional records that you will need in order to sell to a processor.

1. There must be a drug withdrawal sheet on file with the processor from each farm for each batch of each kind of fish.
2. There must be a temperature record for the incoming fish before cleaning; you must keep your product under 41° F.
3. Starting 4/1/09 the Country of origin (USA, Chili, China) must be on the label of every package of fish sold.

On-farm direct to customer

If you are selling directly off of your farm to the end-user (the person who is going to eat the fish and not resell it), you can actually process the fish in front of the customer as a service to the customer. This process is regulated by your local health department and

you will need to work with them to see what they would require. Of course, this may be different from county to county, so be sure to check for your particular situation.

Retail

Many fish farmers like to get their fish custom filleted at a HACCP-approved processing facility and sell it under their own label. This is a good way to add value to your product as the processor can clean, add breading, pack, box and correctly label the product for you. However, to then sell your fish, you may need to get a retail permit (farm store, road-side stand) from the Department of Agriculture and possibly one from the local health department as well. For example, you take 500 pounds of bluegill to a HACCP-approved facility and they fillet and bread your fish. They then pack the 200 pounds of breaded fillets into 40, 5-lb boxes of frozen fillets and put your specially designed label on it for you. You take this home and sell it at your local farmers' market and to your neighbors. You will need to check with your local health Department to see what kind of permits they require.

Wholesale

You may want to sell your fish directly to a restaurant. If you want to wholesale your product after it has been processed in a HACCP-approved facility, you will need to have a frozen food permit from the Department of Agriculture and a permit for handling fish for wholesale from the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

In all of these cases, no repacking of the product is allowable. For example, you cannot get the HACCP-approved facility to pack your product in 25 pound boxes with labels and then repack it at home into 5 pound boxes.

Processing

There are several HACCP-approved processing facilities in Ohio. Some processing plants just cut fish, some bread and box. A good cutter can cut 1000 lbs/day. Cost of cutting is either fillet weight or live weight; make sure you understand the difference. Here is a list. Feel free to contact them for details of their services.

Ohio Processors specializing in Farm Raised Fish

Barry's Perch 'N More
Barry Moffett
1024 Columbus Ave.
Marysville, OH 43040
937-642-0400/937-645-0653
www.barrysperchnmore.com
barry@barrysperchnmore.com

Freshwater Farms of Ohio
Dr. Dave Smith
2624 N. U.S. Hwy. 68
Urbana, Ohio 43078-9537
800-634-7434/937-652-3701
www.fwfarms.com
drdave@fwfarms.com

Blue Ribbon Fish Farm
5367 Waltz Rd.
Mineral City, Ohio 44656
330-364-0560/330-364-0562
www.blueribbonfarmfish.com
blueribbonfarmfish@gmail.com