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Tilapia production rising in Africa

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Egypt accounts for lion's share of total production



Tilapia are commonly cultured in earthen ponds in Egypt. Photo by Dr.
M. Rizk, World Fish Center, Abbasa, Abu Hammad, Sharkia, Egypt.

Tilapia are native to Africa, but the fish have been introduced into many tropical, subtropical, and temperate regions of the world during the second half of the 20th century. Tilapia culture is widely expanding all over the world, particularly in Asia. In Africa, their culture is relatively new, and their contribution to global tilapia production is quite low, about 12.8 percent in 2002.

Decades of development

However, farmed tilapia production in Africa has sharply increased during the past few years. The growth trend can generally be divided into three time periods:

1950-1984: During these years, tilapia production slowly grew from 908 metric tons (MT) in 1950 to 15,747 MT in 1984.

1985-1997: Tilapia production sharply increased to reach 43,946 MT in 1997.

1998-present: Tilapia production had the highest rate of annual growth during the past five years. It increased from 43,946 MT in 1997 to 67,421 MT in 1998, with an annual growth rate of 53.4 percent. Another huge jump in tilapia production occurred 1999-2002, reaching 193,240 MT in 2002. The average annual growth of tilapia production during this phase was over 37 percent.

Major producers

Currently, over 30 African countries practice tilapia farming. However, most tilapia production comes from one country, Egypt, which accounted for 86.8 percent (167,735 MT) of total tilapia production on the continent in 2002. Without Egypt’s production, the continent’s contribution to global tilapia output would have been reduced from 12.8 percent to only 1.7 percent.

Tilapia culture is practiced in Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, D. R. Congo, Zimbabwe, and other countries (Table 1). The contribution of the remaining African countries is relatively insignificant.

Abdel-Fattah, Major producers of farmed tilapia, Table 1

Country	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2
D. R. Congo	700	650	600	600	1,000	1,833	1,993	2,073	2,738	
Egypt	19,857	25,214	21,969	27,854	30,416	52,755	103,988	157,425	152,515	1
Nigeria	7,500	5,500	6,020	3,259	4,978	4,471	1,589	2,705	2,626	
Sudan	200	200	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	
Uganda	47	108	116	40	200	200	350	600	1,550	
Zambia	4,410	4,280	3,770	4,403	3,942	3,942	3,960	4,020	3,980	
Zimbabwe	30	30	50	70	70	70	1,093	2,041	2,165	

Table 1. Major producers of farmed tilapia in Africa.

Cultured species

Although seven tilapia species or species groups are used for aquaculture activities in Africa, Nile tilapia is, by far, the most widely cultured. Nile tilapia are raised in more than 20 African countries. They account for over 90 percent of the continent's total tilapia production. The production of other tilapia species – namely three-spotted tilapia, redbreast tilapia, Mozambique tilapia, redbelly tilapia, and mango tilapia – is very limited.

In addition, tilapia hybrids or “unidentified” tilapia represent a considerable proportion of tilapia production. In fact, the production of this category comes second after Nile tilapia. In 2002, the production of unidentified tilapia amounted to 10,405 MT, representing 5.4 percent of Africa's total harvest.

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