

Shaded areas, picnic tables, food and beverages, bait, tackle, rental equipment, ice, and a fish cleaning service all improve the business opportunity and customer satisfaction. Advertising does not have to be limited to word of mouth, but can include billboards, printed fliers, newspaper advertisements, and even radio and television commercials. Prizes can be given to anglers who catch extremely large fish or specially tagged fish.

**Costs and returns** - It is difficult to determine costs for such an enterprise because many items enter into the picture. The major expenditure will be for fish. Live catfish can be purchased in Florida for \$0.75 to \$1.10 per pound. An entry fee of \$1.00 or more per person should be charged. The price per pound of catfish sold varies from \$1.25 to \$2.00 per pound live weight. Again, a major item would be the cost of liability insurance.

Labor will also add up. Someone must be at the site during all hours of operation to rent and sell concessions, to weigh catfish and collect the appropriate fees, to keep the facilities free of litter, and to minimize the loss of catfish by theft.

Other costs include construction of an office and concession area and toilet facilities, fencing or natural barriers to keep trespassers out and catfish in, catfish feed, and monitoring and maintaining proper water quality.

The returns from a fish-out operation is limited only by the number of pounds of catfish that can be sold. A 7-acre fish-out operation located in Escambia County, Florida has sales as high as 80,000 pounds per year. Channel catfish are obtained at \$0.75 per pound delivered and sold for \$1.35 per pound live weight. Of these, 16% were sold out of holding tanks. This operation has 11 small ponds.

If fish are cleaned on the premises, county health department requirements should be followed. This usually requires a triple stainless steel sink with running water to be on the premises. Fish cleaning service runs around \$0.30 per pound live weight.

Several operators have indicated that they make more money from selling drinks, food, bait, and tackle than from the catfish that are sold.

**Advantages and disadvantages** - A distinct advantage of fish-out operations is in pond size. Small ponds are well suited to such operations. Ponds can also be located within city limits and at major highway intersections. Also, fishing does not have to rely on natural production, but upon artificially maintained populations.

Fish-out operators must have a heavy commitment to public relations, marketing, promoting, and

a sensitivity to public wants and behavior. Such operations are usually near large population centers and highly visible to the public. A lot of time is required on the part of the manager, who must deal with "people problems" such as litter and theft. The risk of liability is greatest for this type of fee fishing enterprise because of the large number of fishermen involved. Thus, the fish-out operator should have adequate liability insurance.

## Conclusions

Fishing has a different meaning for different people. Fee fishing is a means through which Florida pond owners can supply fishing opportunities to the increasing number of anglers in the state and simultaneously use an under-utilized resource for economic gain. Fee fishing is both a form of entertainment and a source of fresh fish for the user.

Fee fishing operations are also good markets for fish producers in Florida. Production acreage in Florida is generally small in scale and highly dispersed geographically. Producers can sell their fish live as an unprocessed product of varying size and in varying quantities. Producers can get a higher price per pound from fish-out operators than paid by processors.

Fee fishing operations in Florida are rapidly increasing in number, but vary substantially in their success. Little is known as to why this variation occurs and what attracts anglers to these facilities. Moderate to large-size ponds with controlled access are best suited for long-term leasing, while small to moderate-size ponds can be day-leased or stocked and used in fish-out operations. Pond construction costs are not listed above. Such costs could be substantial.

Fee fishing can be a source of additional income, but the most important thing to remember about fee fishing is that it involves people management more so than fish management. If an individual does not want to take the time to deal with people, yet wants to use his pond as a source of revenue, then they would be best advised to lease it on a long-term basis to minimize the amount of contact with people.

For additional information on fee fishing and pond management, contact your local county agricultural extension agent, your county Soil Conservation Service agent, or the nearest regional office of the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission. Local phone numbers for these agencies are listed in the government section of your phone book.