

CALIFORNIA AQUACULTURE

VISITING AN AQUACULTURE FACILITY

Introduction

With the success of aquaculture in California, many perspective investors and land owners are considering aquaculture as a business. As part of the evaluation process, it is highly recommended that time be spent visiting several commercial operations. This is essential to gain insight into the resources, capital investment, basic designs, and level of commitment necessary to operate a financially successful aquaculture business. Like any other agricultural business, aquaculture requires substantial investment and is a full-time occupation. Similar to other forms of agriculture, aquatic farming has its own unique aspects that require an understanding of the commitments and resources necessary to run a successful operation.

Initial Contact

The California Aquaculture Association (CAA) is the state aquaculture industry association. It is an excellent contact for obtaining the location of commercial facilities of which you may be able to visit. The CAA provides this service to perspective growers because the industry is interested in new operations becoming successful. Any farm failure has an adverse impact on the industry as a whole, both in image and among financial lending institutions. CAA members also look at you as a prospective customer for young animals as you get started in the business. This office does not arrange farm visits, but you can obtain assistance from the CAA in selecting representative farms to visit by contacting the Secretary of the CAA at the following address:

Secretary

California Aquaculture Association
P.O. Box 1004
Niland, CA 92257
(619) 359-3474

Please remember that not all farms permit visits and those that do may restrict your visit to selected areas of the facility. A highly recommended two-step approach is:

1. Make your initial contact with the CAA and briefly discuss your interest in aquaculture and visiting a facility that grows the species that you are interested in culturing.
2. Prepare for your visit by reading the enclosed publications.

The CAA can provide you with a copy of the *Member Directory: Products and Services* and additional information for a service fee of about \$10.00 which covers cost of production. The directory is an excellent source of producer information, including contacts for producers, available products and services, and membership information. The recommended production facilities for visits will be chosen from this directory.

At the same time that you contact the CAA, you may ask for an invitation to attend a future CAA Director's meeting. These meetings are held four times a year and at various locations throughout the state. Other valuable meetings include the various CAA Regional Workshops and the Annual Conference. These events provide an opportunity to meet established growers, find out the critical aquaculture issues that are being addressed in the state, and to acquire valuable training and information on

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new technologies.

Preparation for a Farm Visit

It is important that you prepare before visiting a commercial farm. This is necessary so that the visit will be of maximum benefit to you and will assure that you will be a welcome guest in the future. Growers do not expect you to know their business or for you to have a high level of expertise in aquaculture. However, to be taken seriously, you should prepare yourself so that you have some basic understanding of how the species you are interested in is grown and what its basic biological requirements are. By reading the material we have provided and by looking over some of the basic reference materials suggested, you will have prepared yourself to ask the more important questions when considering aquaculture as a business. We also suggest that you use the following guidelines as general rules of courtesy and to assure that you obtain the information you are seeking.

Basic Recommendations for Farm Visits

- Read the background information suggested so that you are familiar with the basics of the species of interest and understand what you are seeing. This will result in a better relationship with the grower as it demonstrates your interest and does not take up their time in the more simple fundamentals of fish or shellfish farming

- Before you visit a farm, always make arrangements in advance so that it does not consume too much of the grower's time. Drop-in visitors seeking this type of information are never really welcome and the grower is busy making a living. If the grower cannot accommodate you, do not push for a visit
- Seek basic information primarily designed to test your interest in pursuing aquaculture as an investment or lifestyle. Technical information is available from other sources and many growers prefer to act as a paid consultant if the information being sought is too extensive.
- Before the visit, ask if cameras are welcome. If pictures are permitted, ask if there are areas on the farm where photographs are not permitted.
- Avoid putting hands in the water unless invited to do so. Potential disease transmission between farms, or between tanks, is a concern.
- Always be polite and courteous. Few farming enterprises offer these invitations. Let the grower know that you are a prospective farmer and indicate that you might be interested in obtaining seed-stock if you get started.
- If the grower has fresh fish or shellfish for sale, buy some. You have just been given a great tour at their time and expense and besides, you love fish and shellfish and it is not often that you get a chance to obtain a fresh product of such good quality.

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