

Press Release

Machilipatanam: A big hit for MPEDA's R&D wing

Margao, Jan 30: If there was enough food for thought at the just-concluded 21st edition of the biennial India International Seafood Show (IISS), there was also sumptuous food for the palate in the form of an array of delectable, high-nutrition fish varieties whose wafting aroma was an invitation for both the visitors and food connoisseurs who thronged the three-day showpiece event of the marine sector in Asia.

Such a gastronomical delight was made possible by a small domed tent pitched at the venue with a colourful tag '*Machilipatanam*', courtesy the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Aquaculture (RGCA), a research division of the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) that organized the IISS 2018.

So, while the marine products experts, researchers and policymakers wracked their brains over making seafood safe and sustainable globally, the researchers at the RGCA pitched the makeshift eatery that rustled up a variety of mouthwatering fish delicacies, attracting droves of visitors to the event. The high-nutrition fish varieties, especially cultured *Tilapia* that RGCA has been developing, formed a central ingredient in popular dishes like fish biryani, fish nuggets and fried fish, which were served piping hot to the public.

The *Machilipatanam* tag they come up at the previous IISS in Visakhapatnam in 2016 was a big hit, and in Goa, a land of avowed seafood lovers, it burnished its reputation by willing plenty of people.

The tilapias cooked here are not only edible but also high in nutritional content as they are Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia (GIFT) reared in a special farm at Vijayawada, set up by the RGCA.

“The opportunity to breed GIFT happened when RGCA entered into a technical collaboration with WorldFish Centre, Malaysia, in 2007-8, to set up a Nucleus Breeding Centre from where the RGCA received its high yielding first Generation of GIFT,” said Dr A. Jayathilak, Chairman, MPEDA. “Since then, we have improved upon the first generation of the species and RGCA has now reared the seventh generation of GIFT which is high in nutritional value.”

What makes GIFT unique is that it has white flesh and hence, less cholesterol. In several countries like the US, such genetically improved Tilapias have started replacing red meat. Six months being the period for culturing it, these species have shown a growth rate of eight per cent at the rearing farm.

The RGCA authorities said GIFT is not genetically modified, but the fish are selectively bred under natural conditions. From a pond, Tilapias, with a high growth rate, are chosen and then the males and females from them are mated to get high-yielding varieties and this process goes on.

RGCA has been eyeing export opportunities for the cultured fish species. The “brooders” reared by RGCA are also in demand, with several state governments requesting supplies for “Multiplication Centres”. The first such facility with RGCA’s brooders has been sanctioned in Tamil Nadu, and there have been enquiries from the Kerala and Tripura governments.

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At the Machilipatanam stall, fish delicacies prepared with other varieties such as 'Cobia', Red Snapper and Pacific Shrimp white, also reared by RGCA, were also in much demand. The only hatchery for Cobia exists in Thiruvananthapuram.

The IISS 2018, three-day flagship trade event organized by the MPEDA and the Seafood Export Association of India (SEAI), concluded on Monday.

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