

PRESS RELEASE

MPEDA's research arm RGCA develops open pond culture of Asian Seabass for the first time in India

New method will encourage small and marginal farmers to take up seabass cultivation: MPEDA Chairman A. Jayathilak

Kochi, May 21: In a first for the country's aquaculture sector, the Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) has successfully demonstrated open pond culture of Asian Seabass (*Latescalcarifer*), which can significantly increase the yield of this delectable much-in-demand seafood with huge export potential and help small and marginal farmers to adopt this method in a cost-effective manner.

The demonstration was made by the Rajiv Gandhi Centre of Aquaculture (RGCA), the Research & Development (R&D) arm of the MPEDA, at its demonstration farm at Karaikal in Pondicherry. Seabass, which is reared through 'cage culture', fetches a price of more than Rs 400 a kg in the domestic market and can yield 9.0 tons per hectare under the open pond culture system.

MPEDA Chairman Dr. A. Jayathilak, who witnessed the first catch of huge sizes of seabass fish (average weight of 1.5 to 2.00 kg) and 1.10 tons being caught in a single haul from the Karaikal demonstration farm, said it would be the best alternate species for shrimp which contributes more than 70 per cent of seafood exports.

"Diversified aquaculture is the key for sustainability. This kind of diversified fish is quite promising and it has the potential to significantly add to the seafood export basket. The production of up to 9 tons per hectare is really encouraging. In the future the production will be scaled up by keeping in mind the sustainability and eco-friendly culture practices," he said, adding: "The technology for commercial production of these species would be made available to farmers very soon by RGCA."

Dr. Jayathilak, who is also President of RGCA, said the cage culture in ponds is a suitable method for growing Seabass, but investment costs are high and cannot be afforded by small and margin farmers.

"But the open pond culture method can help these small farmers without much investment. The new method was tried for the first time in Karaikal and it proved successful," he pointed out.

The demonstration farm measuring 4.00 hectares belongs to the Puducherry government and it was leased out to RGCA in 2000, which has achieved a string of milestones from 2002 onwards. A number of farmers, students and researchers from India, besides foreign scientists and entrepreneurs from countries like Australia, USA, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, have visited this farm, which is the best demonstration farm for saeabass and mud crab and the most

ideal place for learning techniques and hands on training. So far, around 2,000 participants have been trained in this farm.

Dr. Jayathilak said RGCA is concentrating its research on seed production, nursery rearing and grow-out methods of various species like Cobia, Artemia, Scampi, Tilapia, Pompano, Grouper and Red Snapper fishes for both brackish and marine waters. While GIFT Tilapia is suited for fresh water aquaculture, mudcrab and Artemia are also the best species for diversified aquaculture, which suits women entrepreneurs, especially self-help groups.

Marine products export has been projected at 11.35 lakh MT worth six billion dollars in 2017-18, which is \$300 million more from \$5.7 billion in the previous year. “However, it is centric to shrimp which contributes more than 70 per cent. The new open pond culture method will greatly spur the diversification of India’s aquaculture sector,” he said.