



Michael Miller Radio Interview WTRC Radio (<http://www.am1340.com>)

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Gary Sieber/ WTRC NewsRadio 1340/The Information Station/Elkhart, IN:

I understand you're raising yellow perch, just getting started and eventually will have the capacity for that 9 million pounds, right?

Michael Miller, President & COO Bell Aquaculture (<http://www.bellperch.com>): That's true. We brought in our first fish in March of 2007 and we'll be bringing our second building on-line, which will add over 600,000 pounds of fish in the round; and the target, of course, is well over 9 million pounds.

GS: And the idea here is this a farm, so you'll be selling these to, what, restaurants, all over the country?

MM: Directly, yes.

GS: And what's the advantage of raising perch? I know they are pretty hard to catch; they kind of run in season, out of season in lakes and things like that. Sometimes they're hot and sometimes they're not.

MM: The greatest difficulty for restaurants has been the availability of yellow perch out of Lake Michigan and Lake Erie – the two predominant lakes for the supply of wild-caught yellow perch. And based on a lot of studies that have gone on either through Purdue, the commercial landings were in the neighborhood of 36-38 million pounds per year back in 1984. And they've recently released information out of Lake Erie in Ohio that last year's commercial catch was 1.5 million pounds. And 2004 statistics out of Lake Michigan indicate 109,000 lbs., which would indicate we're now below 2 million pounds for yellow perch commercially landed. Which means the restaurants that were typically serving customers who enjoy the taste of yellow perch, just cannot get the supply.

GS: A lot of restaurants when you go there, Michael, advertise the fact that they are fresh caught lake perch – Lake Michigan perch, that sort of thing. Will this be any different for them? Will they have to change their marketing a little bit? And are the farm-raised perch any better or any worse than the lake perch?

MM: Well we would certainly suggest that the yellow perch that we're raising, the Bell Perch, is a higher quality product from the standpoint that there is no real possibility of contaminants entering into their food chain during their growth. We have absolute control over our water supply, since they are raised in-house there is no opportunity for bird predation, pesticides or herbicides to get into the flesh of the fish that you and I might sit down to eat.

GS: How hard is it to raise yellow perch, Michael? I mean is it a fairly easy thing or is it fairly complicated?

MM: Well, it's reasonably complicated, just like any animal, they have their own needs and obviously each day things change. The biggest rule for aquaculture is 'take care of the water and the fish will take care of themselves.' So as long as we maintain their environment, with very pristine water, it's a relatively easy job. The challenge is staying ahead of the curve on water quality, water temperature and making sure they are fed on a timely basis – they're fed at least 3-5 times a day.

Paul Weaver, WTRC Radio Producer: Question for you: after you get this going and it sounds like you're well underway, will you be raising any other types of fish or just this type?

MM: We're going to focus only on yellow perch. Yellow perch should keep us reasonably busy. With the market being 38 million pounds -- and we're bringing essentially 9 million pounds plus -- we're only a quarter of the way through the market. So there's quite an opportunity for just yellow perch.

GS: Why did you pick the area down in Albany, IN – which is not too far from Muncie, right?

MM: Correct. I actually grew up in the Chicago area in Evanston and from about the time I was four, the first time I can remember, I came down to the family farm which is directly adjacent to our operation here at Bell Aquaculture, so I'm very familiar with this area. And having gone to school at Miami of Ohio for a period of time and University of Denver, this is an area I wanted to return to getting away from the big city.

GS: How in the world did you get into aquaculture in the first place? What possessed you to say 'Gee, I want to raise perch'?

MM: Well originally I was working with a few producers at National Audubon down at Turner Broadcasting in my Corporate Business Affairs role and they threw this word out, aquaculture, and I spent a little time doing some research at CNN using the resources available to me with newswires and the public library. When I moved back to Indiana, I got involved with the Indiana Aquaculture Association, made some important contacts - a gentleman by the name of Dr. Gary Miller in the Syracuse, IN, area. He more or less steered me and acted as my mentor, and after 12-14 years of research and deciding the system and species of fish that I was interested in, the dream became reality.

GS: All right, Michael, good luck to you and we appreciate you joining us this morning. And again those fish will be available starting in 2009 to restaurants around. Again the name of the company is Bell Aquaculture – Michael Miller, President and Chief Operating Officer. Thanks very much for joining us.

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