

Tilapia production grew 223 pc in ten years

Between 2005 and 2015, the production of the most farmed fish in Brazil, tilapia (*Oreochromis niloticus*), experienced a 223 per cent growth thanks to the modernization and intensification of its production, both in cages and in containers dug in the ground.

In 2005, tilapia production in the country was 67,850.50 tonnes, according to the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA). Already in 2015, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) estimated that the production of this species reached 219,329 tonnes, reported EMBRAPA Fisheries and Aquaculture.

These data were collected during the performance of the project "The socioeconomic repercussions of tilapia farming in Brazil" led by EMBRAPA Fishing and Aquaculture (TO) and its partners, who visited seven major production hubs of this species: Oros y Castanhao in Ceará ; Sub-medio y Bajo San Francisco, on the border of the states of Bahia, Pernambuco and Alagoas; Ilha Solteira in the border of San Pablo with Mato Grosso del Sur; the northern and western regions of Paraná and Valle Bajo del Itajaí, in Santa Catarina.

The favourable climate, the resistance of the species to accept different production systems and the high demand of the products, in addition to the good results of intensive farming, are some of the factors that have contributed to consolidate the production of tilapia in the country.

The regulation of the use of public waters for the intensive culture of fish in cages promoted tilapia farming, a species that concentrates 90 per cent of the requests of aquaculture sites in the country.

"The concession of the use of water from lakes and hydroelectric dams has allowed aquaculture producers to start production without having possession of these waters, which accelerates the growth of this industry in the country," explains veterinarian doctor Renata Melon Barroso, coordinator of the project led by EMBRAPA.

The study also found that there has been an increase in the technification of production and a greater professionalism of the producers in many hubs, which contributed to a substantial increase in productivity.

"The use of equipment, associated with management practices to control the farming parameters, has contributed to increase the density of cultivation also in the excavated ponds, increasing the productivity that, in the hubs that are based on the use of nurseries on land, as in Paraná and Santa Catarina, jumped from 30 to 50 tonnes per hectare," says Barroso.

According to the expert, the increase in productivity can be attributed to the greater professionalism of fish farmers, who understand that in order to be competitive and stay in business they must have control of their operations and use cost recording mechanisms, with great care of management and water quality.

The profitability of tilapia, which can vary from 10 to 20 per cent for the producer, has led to greater investment to buy equipment in order to improve water quality and automate farming, as well as for high quality food.

At the most advanced hubs, scientists have observed the use of aerators - ventilators that increase the amount of oxygen in the water and allow more fish to be raised in the same space - as well as automatic feeders, classifiers and counters, among other equipment.

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