

NOAA intends to develop commercial sablefish farming

Scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) intend to find ways to make it easier and more efficient to commercially harvest sablefish (*Anoplopoma fimbria*) as part of the federal agency's efforts for marine aquaculture to contribute to meet a growing demand worldwide for seafood.

Sablefish, also known as black cod or butterfish, are a long-lived species native to the northeast Pacific Ocean and highly valued in Asia for its beneficial nutrients and delicate flavour.

In this research project being developed by the NOAA, the scientists are replacing algae with clay, which is used to help sablefish larvae better find their prey. Wild fish are caught off the Washington coast and used to develop captive brood stocks, or mature fish that are used for breeding, the agency Associated Press reported.

At the facility, the fertilized eggs grow in silos in dark, cold rooms before being moved to other indoor tanks where they are fed a steady diet of brined shrimp and other food. Large circular tanks hold fish in different growth stages.

The facility, set up in Seattle, produces about 10,000 all-female fingerlings, or juveniles about an inch long, each year, all female that are about an inch in length.

Fisherman from the West Coast of the US annually capture million pounds of sablefish and some of them are concerned that the development of the commercial farming offers competitiveness to their business. There are also sectors offering concerns about the fact that the large-scale farming could affect the wild populations or ocean health.

In this regard, Robert Alverson, executive director of the Fishing Vessel Owners' Association, ensures that the farming practices used in the United States meet strict environment regulations.

In 2015, fisherman harvested about 35 million pounds of sablefish worth USD 113 million in the United States, all along the West Coast. Nearly half of the sablefish caught in the United States is exported, with a majority going to Japan.

For some years, NOAA scientists have worked to reduce the potential barriers to sablefish aquaculture and have developed techniques to produce all-female stocks of sablefish that grow faster and much bigger than males in about 24 months.

In addition, they have also studied different ways to reduce the costs of feeding juvenile fish, increase larvae survival rates and decrease deformities.

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