

Marine fishermen turn farmers

Instead Of Going For Traditional Fishing, Many Are Warming Up To Cage-Culture

Sudha.Nambudiri
@timesgroup.com

Kochi: Fresh fish is fast becoming a reality for Kochilites with more than 400 cage farms coming up in and around the city. A good many are there right in the backwaters and near the islands including Kadamakudy, Pizhala and Vypin.

Stretching right up to the end of the district till Kottapuram in Thrissur are another 100 cages. All you need is about Rs 3-4 lakh in investment and with all the subsidies that have been announced, it is going to become all much more economical. Farmers say it requires no extra investment till harvest. "The fish is sold fresh and often at fairs. Invitations are sent to resident associations and on media. The farmers sell their own stuff and there are no middlemen involved. The unsold fish are put back into the cages," said Imeld.Joseph, head, mariculture division, Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), whose team helps in setting up the cages and trains the farmers in the business.

She says that though cage farming was introduced in 2009, it is from 2015 that the cage culture started catching up. The price of the same variety of fish was when compared with those caught otherwise. For instance, pearl spot costs about Rs 400 when it is supplied from farms while it is more than Rs700 when it is caught by other means of fishing from backwaters. This is the reason why people are increasingly opting for fresh fish from cage farming.

Cage farming also offers the farmers a chance to utilize the existing water resources which are not used for other purposes. All these factors together have helped increase the popularity of cage farming among both researchers as well as commercial producers.

The farming season is mostly from the month of June to April. Mullet, tilapia, pearl spot and milkfish are among those which are commonly grown in these farms.

The Krishivigyan Kendra (KVK), which works with the farmers, organizes what is called as the farmgate market organized during festive seasons or once a month and people can literally get the produce directly from the farms.

"We help the farmers form small companies and they manage all the aspects of the farming," said Shinoj Subramannian, head, KVK.

Hence, farmers have learnt to fix the rates, which are reasonable. "We have no worries about losses. If it is not sold, they are put back into the cages," said a farmer.

One of the main worries of farmers is the increasing pollution in rivers, including Periyar. "When industry units dump chemicals, it will kill our fish as well," said Sreekumar, another farmer.

"Cage farming helps clear the water pollution because people in the water get a good feed, a more watchful. Of course, during the monsoon, there is the threat of opening of dams which could result in floods that wash away the cages," said Imelda Joseph.

The farmers are also provided information about fish feed and their growth. One kg fish feed costs around Rs 40 and the protein content in the feed is around 35-38%. At later stages of growth, the protein content is reduced to around 24%. A major threat in fish farming is that diseases could spread across the water bodies and kill the entire lot. But with an alert national and international fish disease network, farmers say they are mostly monitoring them," he said.

There are both floating and fixed cages. "Last couple of years we used



	Milkfish (Pooneen)	Pearl Spot (Karimeen)	Barramundi (Branchi)	GIFT tilapia
Water	Brackish	Fresh+brackish	Brackish	Fresh+brackish
Harvesting	10 mths-1 yr	10 mths	7 mths	6 mths
Yield	1 kg	1 kg	1 kg	300 gms
	Grey Mullet (Thirudha)	Cobia (Modha)	Silver Pompano (Valavody Patta)	
Water	Fresh+brackish	Marine	Marine	
Harvesting	1 yr	6 mths	6 mths	
Yield	500 gms	2 kg	300 gms	

COST OF CAGES

1.5m (L)
1.5m (W)
2m (Depth)
₹7,000 (ponds, pokkall fields)

4m (L)
4m (W)
2 m (Depth)
₹45,000 (Brackish+Sea)

8m (L)
4m (W)
2 m (Depth)
₹90,000 (Brackish+Sea)



An app to order fish from hatcheries

Kochi: With contaminated or adulterated fish sparking a huge scare, the demand for fresh fish supply from cage is increasing and islanders in and around Kochi are making the most of it.

Pizhala resident Sreekumar started cage farming almost three years ago when it was not such a popular venture. Today, he is part of the Kadamakudy Matsyaseva which works to promote fish farming in the islands. "There are over 135 cage farms in Pizhala alone and it is the women who are mostly monitoring them," he said.

There are both floating and fixed cages. "Last couple of years we used

to organize fairs during festivals and people from all over would come and buy. Now, the cooperative banks organize sale for us in different places. They do the publicity and arrange the infrastructure. We go with our fish tanks and set up individual stalls and sell the product. We take it from the tank, clean it and give to the customer right in front of their eyes," he added.

People also buy through the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute's (CMFRI) mobile application 'marinefishsales'. "People book on the app and it will be delivered to those in the 10km radius of the CMFRI.

At the farm of Sunny P L in Njarrakkal, there are about six tonnes fish at present. "Around 10,000 juvenile fish are stocked per hectare in June. Milkfish are harvested when they grow to about 550gms-2kg, that is when they taste the best. Harvesting takes place in the morning and fish are caught according to the demand. Most of the fish are sold locally while the rest, around 50-100kg are sold in cities," he said.

N P Ramanan, a cage farmer from Pallipuram said, "Juvenile fish are collected from the sea when they are bred at seashores and grown up to a certain size after which they are transferred into fish cages." 768