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2015 AQ Summit: Emerging Species Update

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Emerging Species -- Tap Pryor --02-02-15

New technologies have made on-land, indoor marine aquaculture economically viable. However, the limited number of suitable species remains something of a bottleneck. To be suitable, the fish of choice must be susceptible to artificial spawning, be hardy in tanks, grow to market size rapidly, and have strong appeal to consumers. There are four emerging species that in the relatively near future should meet these criteria: California yellowtail, black sea bass, pompano, and bluefin tuna. My company, Acadia Harvest Inc. (AHI) has been working with California yellowtail at the University of Maine's Center for Cooperative Research (CCAR) for three years. Early cohorts grew rapidly and were welcomed by seafood distributors. Last spring when the broodstock spawned prolifically, CCAR staff managed a good hatch and we saved 15,000 for more test marketing this summer. We also have faith in black sea bass and pompano, neither of which is being farmed commercially, but both of which are prized wherever they can be found. The problem they share is slow growth, but researchers have demonstrated that especially palatable feed will accelerate growth for one while certain micronutrients will do it for the other, even getting pompano to one pound in seven months. Meanwhile, bluefin tuna, threatened with extinction, are the dream crop of marine fish farmers. Happily, workers in Japan, Australia, the US – at the University of Maryland –, and by teams based in Germany and Spain are making rapid strides towards its domestication. After 10,000 years of domestication progress, the number of types of terrestrial livestock on the market can be counted on both hands. If you add my four choices to the six most commonly farmed crops – catfish, tilapia, salmon, sturgeon, sea bass and bream – are more needed? Perhaps the emphasis should shift from more variety to enhanced hatchery skills, tank husbandry, nutrition, and genetics.