

Researchers hope to foster fish farming in Georgia area

FORT VALLEY, Ga. (AP) — The gurgling tanks in Pat Duncan's greenhouses are filled with colorful fish and lush water hyacinths. Nearby, herbs are growing, sustained by the tanks' nutrient-laden water.

Duncan is an aquaculture specialist and hopes her fish production research at Fort Valley State University will provide Georgia farmers with an alternate source of income. And with the latest compact recirculating systems costing as \$1,000 to \$2,000, fish farming can be an option for just about anyone, from Atlanta condo dwellers to plantation owners.

"We're here to help Georgians with any type of aquacultural systems they set up, whether it's in ponds, raceways, recirculating systems or in cages," Duncan said.

Duncan's push for aquaculture comes at a time when demand for fresh and saltwater shrimp, catfish and tilapia, all of which can be produced in Georgia, has been increasing. U.S. seafood consumption climbed three straight years before hitting a record 4.8 billion pounds in 2004, the latest year for which government statistics are available.

"Aquaculture is a viable alternative type of agriculture," Duncan said. "There's no doubt there will be

an increasing demand for seafood now and in the future."

Duncan said fish harvesting from the oceans is at a maximum and fisheries that are depleted are unlikely to recover.

"So with the growing demand and population growth, farmers will have to fill the gap," Duncan said. "This gives them opportunity."

Georgia has lagged behind Mississippi, Alabama and Florida in fish farming, but still manages to rank among the top 10 or 11 states in production.

Duncan, who has worked in five other Southern states, said some states have made a stronger com-

mitment to the industry. Despite this, Georgia still has some successful fish farmers.

Gary Burtle, a University of Georgia aquaculture expert, said the successful ones just don't make headlines like those who fail.

"You hear about the guy who went in a big way and failed," Burtle said.

"But you don't hear about the guy who is producing, who has his market problems solved and who has sent his kids to college."

Marketing is critical, Duncan said, adding that prospective fish farmers need to line up buyers before they produce a single fish.

Duncan said, "I tell people to be careful."

Duncan hosted a conference Tuesday, focusing on research with recirculating systems at Fort Valley State, the institution designated by the governor as Georgia's Center for Aquaculture Development. Burtle also spoke there.

Duncan's greenhouses hold about a dozen recirculating systems, allowing her to raise tilapia, catfish, freshwater shrimp known as prawns and other species.

The systems have some of the same components as aquariums, only on a larger scale.

The water constantly circulates

through filters that clean it while pumps maintain healthy oxygen levels.

Duncan grows water hyacinths on the water's surface to remove nitrogen, and has hydroponic herb gardens nearby with dill, parsley and basil nourished by nutrients from the fish tanks.

The tanks can range in size from a motel swimming pool to a child's wading pool, but three or four feet deep.

And while a low-end system might cost as little as \$1,000, larger ones can run \$100,000 to \$200,000, Duncan said.

Ed Pate, 48, a substitute letter carrier in southwest Georgia's Randolph County, attended the conference.

He said he learned about aquaculture at a farm show last summer and has been interested in producing catfish and trout ever since.

"I've got a friend who raises shrimp," he said.

"Everybody likes seafood and fish. I wonder if it's feasible to produce them."

Rail lines carrying more and longer cargo, officials say

WICHITA (AP) — Several factors have combined to bring more and longer trains to Kansas in recent years, and railway officials say that is not likely to change anytime soon.

The primary reasons train traffic has increased is a rapid growth in intermodal transportation, more demand for some products and Kansas' location, railroad officials say.

Intermodal shipping, in which goods are carried so that they can be transferred between different types of carriers on a single trip, has led to more railcars being used to haul truck trailers, for example.

"We're setting new volume records for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is rapid growth in the intermodal sector," said Steve Forsberg, a spokesman for Fort Worth, Texas-based BNSF Railway Co.

Forsberg said the intermodal sector has become the fastest-growing part of the transportation industry, increasing at an annual rate of more than 13 percent.

And Kansas sees more of those trains because it is on a route that runs between Chicago and Los An-

geles, he said. The transcon route carries 1,400 trains every 24 hours, with the longest up to 8,000 feet, he said.

"We carried 5.3 million truck trailers by train in 2005, and the majority of those moved through Kansas," Forsberg said, noting that Lowell, Ark.-based trucking company J.B. Hunt is BNSF's largest customer.

Union Pacific Corp. has also been handling record volumes every quarter for the last three years, said company spokesman Mark Davis.

The fastest growth area for the Omaha, Neb.-based company is also intermodal traffic, but agricultural volumes are also up significantly, Davis said, because of growth in ethanol production and low-sulfur coal moving out of Wyoming's Southern Powder River basin.

"Industrial products such as lumber, bricks, steel, automobiles and auto parts sort of ebb and flow with the economy," Davis said.

"But over the last three years, everything has been steadily up."

The number of Union Pacific trains moving through Kansas has increased, and trains are also

slightly longer, averaging 78 cars compared with 72 a year ago, he said.

Many rail lines are scrambling to grow fast enough to meet the increased demand, Forsberg said. BNSF has added more than 1,000 miles of new track since 1995, including 32 miles in Kansas, he said.

The increase in traffic has led to more jobs, Forsberg said, with BNSF seeing a net growth of 3,500 employees in the last three years.

All that traffic has some cities, including Wichita and Olathe, considering building overpasses and underpasses to help smooth the flow of train and automobile traffic.

"Kansas has been very proactive in handling the growth," Forsberg said.

"We have more than a dozen projects under way in Kansas. That's five times as many as California, which has 10 times the population."

Forsberg and Davis both said intermodal transportation is good for trucking companies because it significantly reduces fuel costs and improves morale of drivers, who generally have shorter trips.

Taking trucks off the roads also reduces traffic congestion and highway maintenance, Forsberg said.

"I got a call from a woman in Olathe upset about waiting for a train," he said.

"I reminded her that if it weren't

for that train, there would be 300 more trucks on the road moving that freight.

"You add that up across the country and that's 2.5 to 3 million truck trailers a year going by rail instead of down I-70 and I-35."

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