

A FISH STORY

THE ADVANTAGES OF GOLDFISH OVER CATTLE. BY LEE PITTS

Goldfish ranching was first developed at the Pitts' Institute of Technology (School motto: It's the PITS). I was cleaning out a water trough and trying to save the goldfish living in it when the idea struck me. Why not supplement my cattle income by raising and selling goldfish? I was letting a source of income go down the drain, so to speak.

Aquaculture has many advantages that agriculture does not. In my neck of the woods goldfish are currently selling for \$3.50 each, which comes to about \$667 a pound, I think. Besides, to the best of my knowledge, there aren't a lot of people in the goldfish business so you might say that I'd be a big fish in a small pond.

My banker loved the "goldfish ranch" idea because I was "integrating horizontally." That sounded dirty to me but anything the banker likes, I like. With the bank loan I bought a new pickup for me, and for the banker I bought some scuba gear—fins and a wet suit (extra large)—to wear when he came out to count his collateral.

I imported an exotic grand champion goldfish from China (where else?) and began breeding the goldfish in captivity. I raised them everywhere: in the sheep's water trough, the cow's water, the dog's water, and my horse Gentleman's water. I even used my wife's washing machine for a goldfish Jacuzzi. Although my horse enjoyed their company, I could tell that some of the fish got homesick, but I chalked it up to "long time no sea."

As near as I can tell, goldfish don't eat anything. All you have to do is give them some water, and they don't really use much of that. Although there is a lack of literature on the subject, the goldfish convert much better than chickens, dress out about equal, and I am told they taste about the same too. (I haven't eaten a goldfish since I was five years old and my brother dared me to do it.)

As far as I know, there is no Goldfish Association or breed magazine, but I've got the extension agent working on it and as soon as his research is complete, we are going to have a field day at the ranch.

The advantages of goldfish over cattle, pigs or sheep are endless. The fish have multiple births and you don't ever have to get up at two a.m. to pull a baby one. There are no supplements to buy, no vet bills to pay, and no flies. If they do get sick, all you do is flush

them down the toilet. The only thing they don't have going for them is a government subsidy...at least I think they don't. I'll get my congressman working on it right away, just as soon as he gets out of rehab.

All this is not to suggest that goldfish ranching does not have its risky moments. The earthquake in 2006 slopped 36 fish overboard and I got there too late to help. It was a terrible sight to behold. And it is a season-

al business. Goldfish are very sensitive to water temperature and after the bad winter of '99, all I had to show for my work were some goldfishsicles.

Finally I got around to marketing my fish. To my dismay, I found that fraternities no longer encourage their members to eat goldfish. So I went down to the local pet shop and asked if they wanted to buy my 2007 crop. The pet-shop owner informed me that there were currently too many goldfish on the market and that he could buy foreign fish cheaper. In the end I only lost \$6,000 on my goldfish ranch. But it was still better than most years raising cattle.

Sadly, the banker wouldn't renew my goldfish loan, but it's just as well. Last week my horse accidentally drank my herd sire. ■

Lee Pitts lives in Los Osos, Calif. Check www.LeePittsbooks.com or page 5 in this issue.

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