Cultivo Experimental de Peces en Estanques

PREFACE

While one of the roots of New Alchemy lies in the disenchantment some of us feel with the framework of institutional science, we do not wish to present the attitude that there is little of value in the work being done in universities and research stations of the world. Science and technology do make important contributions and from time to time we shall describe some of the work which seems especially relevant from a New Alchemy point of view.

Such an editorial effort is handicapped by the impossibility of keeping up with all the scientific literature in even one field. We are indebted to Sr. Alberto Donadio, of Medellin, Colombia, for bringing to our attention the work of Prof. Anibal Patiño R. of the Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia.

Professor Patiño's work is especially gratifying to me, since he has arrived independently at many ideas similar to my own for the development of tropical aquaculture (McLarney, 1973a), and has demonstrated that they will work — biologically and economically.

The following account, which should be of interest to anyone involved in tropical ecologies or economies, is excerpted and paraphrased, with Professor Patiño's kind permission, from his paper "Cultivo experimental de peces en estanques", which appeared in Cespedesia, Vol. II, No. 5, pp. 75-127. For information on obtaining the original paper (in Spanish), write Cespedesia, Jardin Botanico del Valle, Apartado aereo 5660, Cali, Colombia.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Patiño's work parallels New Alchemy schemes for tropical aquaculture in four respects:

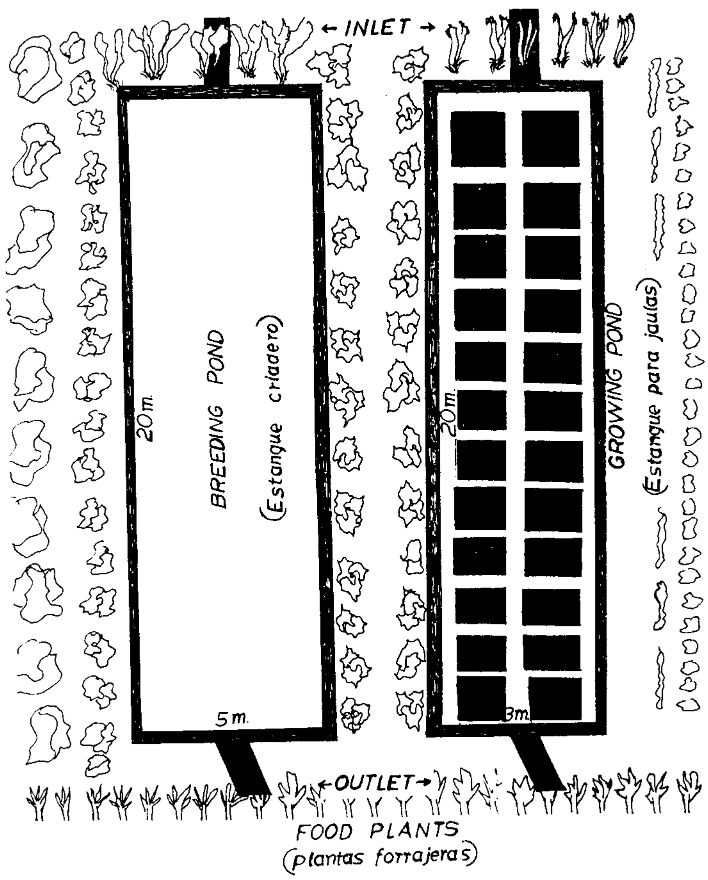
1. He advocates polyculture of certain species of *Tilapia* and local fish species.
2. The primary foods for the fish, apart from those produced by fertilizing the fish pond, are weeds, agricultural wastes or various plants which can be cultivated with a minimum of effort.
3. Selected fish are grown to market size in cages. The remainder are left, essentially unmanaged, in a pond which serves as a hatchery.
4. Excess small fish are fed to other farm livestock, such as hogs and chickens. The wastes from these animals are used to fertilize the pond.

Professor Patiño has demonstrated the economic feasibility of this approach for the campesino (small farmer). He has also outlined plans for the implementation of this sort of fish culture in the countryside.

We shall discuss these features of Professor Patiño's work in the order listed above. All of the work described was carried out in four ponds fed by the Rio Tulua in El Jardin Botanico del Valle, Mateguadua, Colombia. The ponds, each 10 m x 30 m x 1.2 m, were lined with polyethylene and fertilized with cow manure. Professor Patiño and four students from the Universidad del Valle accomplished all of the work from the construction of the ponds with pick and shovel to the conclusion of the experiments in a year and a half.

POLYCULTURE

Four species were chosen for the initial studies: *Tilapia mossambica* Peters, *Tilapia rendalli* Boulanger (= *Tilapia melanopleura*), and two native characins, the bocachico (*Prochilodus reticulatus magdalenae* Steindachner) and the jetudo or patalo (*Ichthyoelephas longirostris* Steindachner). The two tilapia were chosen because of the ease with which they may be cultured, and because of their different feeding habits. As both species are already established in the Rio Cauca drainage, which includes the Rio Tulua, there are no ecological objections to the use of these exotics. The native species were chosen because both are valuable food fishes currently threatened by environmental change, and because they might fill ecological niches complementary to the tilapia.



To describe briefly the four species:

T. mossambica is omnivorous, but feeds mostly on phytoplankton and benthos. It is a mouthbreeder and multiplies very rapidly, which leads to overcrowding and sometimes enables it to out-compete valuable, but less prolific or aggressive species. *T. rendalli* is herbivorous by preference. Though not a mouthbreeder, it is, nevertheless, more prolific than either of the characins studied. Both species of tilapia are considered good food fishes.

The bocachico is economically the most important fish in the Cauca valley. It feeds on algae and detritus, obtained by sucking up mud and periphyton. In the Cauca valley, it may compete with *T. mossambica.* The bocachico lives mostly in standing or slow-moving waters, but requires running water to breed.

The jetudo, in nature, is entirely a creature of swiftly flowing waters. It feeds primarily on algae attached to rocks and river bottoms and is described as having a "delicate" flavor.

Professor Patiño has only begun to investigate the possibilities of culturing the two native species, but he has raised two important questions:

1. What is the behavior of the jetudo when confined in standing water?
2. What is the effect on growth of the bocachico in ponds when combined with *T. mossambica* or *T. rendalli?*

With respect to the first question, it was demonstrated that the jetudo will survive and grow in standing water. This is also true of another edible characin, the machaca, *Brycon guatemalensis,* which occurs naturally only in flowing waters (McLarney, 1973b). Sixty-four jetudo, with a mean weight of 69.3 g, were introduced into one of the ponds. Over a period of twelve months they grew to a mean weight of about 115 g. Only four died. Prior to the introduction of the fish the pond was fertilized with commercial 14-14-14 fertilizer and planted densely with *Elodea canadensis* to maintain high levels of dissolved O_2. The lowest concentration recorded during the experiment was 6.8 ppm. This experiment was disrupted somewhat by the accidental introduction of some young *T. mossambica,* which may have competed for food with the jetudo.

Two ponds were used in the tilapia - bocachico experiments. One was stocked with 150 juvenile bocachico with a mean weight of 34.7 g and 100 *T. mossambica* with a mean weight of 6.0 g. The other pond received an identical lot of bocachico plus 80 *T. rendalli* with a mean weight of 47. 6 g. (It should be noted here that a possible limiting factor in culture of the bocachico is its delicacy with respect to handling. Mortality of bocachico during capture, transport and stocking was thirty-five per cent, that of tilapia less than five per cent.) Prior to stocking, both ponds were fertilized with 14-14-14 at the rate of 1 kg/pond; at the time of stocking the water in both was light green. The *T. rendalli* pond was densely planted with *Elodea canadensis.* Three months later, *Elodea* was placed in the *T. mossambica* pond as well, to aid in oxygenation.

Periodic examination of the stomach contents of sample fish showed that there was more overlap between the feeding niches of the bocachico and *T. mossambica* than between bocachico and *T. rendalli.* While the ponds differed in such respects as size and reproductive rate of tilapia, dissolved O_2 concentration, provision of supplementary food (leaves of various plants supplied daily to the *T. rendalli*), and abundance of aquatic plants, the evidence suggests that the combination bocachico – *T. rendalli* is complementary, while the combination bocachico – *T. mossambica* – is not.

This conclusion is more strongly supported by the relative growth rates of the bocachico in the two ponds. After twelve months the bocachico confined with *T. mossambica* had reached a mean weight of about 94 g, while those in the *T. rendalli* pond had reached a mean weight nearly double that – about 175 g.

If bocachico or jetudo are to be used in practical fish culture, they must be bred in captivity. This has not been done to date, but Professor Patiño does not foresee this as a serious problem. He thinks that the process of pituitary injection, which has been successful in inducing many other typically rheophilic South American fishes to spawn in standing water (de Menezes, 1966), is likely to succeed with these species also.

The remainder of the work was carried out solely with the two *Tilapia* spp. Some of this work has further implications for polyculture.

USE OF AGRICULTURAL WASTES OR WEEDS AS FISH FOOD

A variety of terrestrial and aquatic plants were tested for acceptability for food for *T. rendalli.* Fifteen, including the aquatics *Elodea canadensis, Potamogeton crispus* and *Chara* sp. were consumed readily. Ramos (1971) and Huet (1970) offer additional lists of plants accepted by herbivorous tilapia. Hickling (1971) states that *T. rendalli* will accept a daily ration of 15% of its weight in yuca leaves (*Manihot esculenta*) or 33% in *Colocasia.* The difference reflects the water content of the leaves.

Of the plants tested, Professor Patiño recommends yuca, bore (*Alocasia macrorhiza*) and chayamansa (*Cnidoscolus chayamansa*), an edible euphorb shrub indigenous to Mexico. He lists four advantages of these plants:

1. Their leaves are high in protein (17.2 per cent, 23.25 per cent and 24.2 per cent, respectively).
2. They are easy to grow and can be propagated vegetatively.
3. They grow rapidly and produce large amounts

of useable vegetation.

4. They are tolerant of poor soils.

Professor Patiño suggests the consumption of aquatic plants by *T.rendalli* might be useful in weed control. I would like to suggest that in some instances they could be "pastured". In general, the provision of vegetable foods for tilapia should be left up to the individual farmer who best knows his local resources. If the leaves of a plant, such as yuca or banana, which can also provide the farmer with food or a cash crop, can be employed, so much the better.

CULTURE OF *T. RENDALLI* IN CAGES

The major problem in tilapia culture is overpopulation resulting in stunting. Three solutions have been applied.

1. Careful selection of only male fish for the culture pond.
2. Production of "monosex" hybrids — one hundred per cent male or nearly so.
3. Careful use of predatory fishes to thin, but not eradicate, the tilapia.

These techniques all require inputs of energy and managerial skill which cannot ordinarily be expected of the Latin American campesino embarking on a completely new food-raising enterprise. Cage culture solves the problem more simply. The eggs of all species of tilapia sink and are initially deposited in a nest dug in the bottom of the pond. When the fish are confined in wire cages suspended off the bottom, the eggs pass through the cage bottom out of reach of parental care. The pond in which the cages are placed or preferably, another pond, can be used as a natural "hatchery" in which tilapia are left to multiply virtually unmanaged. From time to time, stock can be selected from this pond for intensive culture to market size in the cages.

Other advantages of cage culture include:

1. Intensive culture with minimal labor and materials.
2. Technological and economic feasibility for the campesino.
3. Facilitation of feeding, inspection of the stock and harvest.
4. Continual harvest and replenishment of growing stock.
5. Rendering many types of water bodies useable for fish culture.

The first two cages constructed by Professor Patiño and the students were made of galvanized wire mesh and chanu or chano (*Humiriastrum procerum*) a local water-resistant wood. The cages, 2 m x 1 m x 1 m, were situated on legs which raised them 25 cm off the pond bottom. Later cages were constructed more economically by making four of the sides from such indigenous materials as cane. Wire was used for the bottom so that enough light could penetrate to permit the growth of oxygenating plants underneath the cage.

The cages were placed 1 m apart in one of the ponds, over a dense growth of *Elodea*. Each cage was stocked with 50 or 100 three month-old *T. rendalli* with a mean weight of 22.5 g. Each cage received a handful of bore leaves twice daily. Two cages received an additional daily supplement of wheat bran. At the beginning of the experiment each cage was given ½ kg of bran daily. This was gradually increased to 1 kg/day.

The result was excellent growth and low mortality (four per cent). For the first month the young fish, which had been reared previously on commercial pelleted food, refused to eat the bore leaves. Subsequently they accepted the leaves and grew rapidly. After five months in the cages, when the fish were eight months old, the mean weight of the fish not receiving the bran supplement was 165 g. Those receiving the supplement averaged 200 - 250 g. Growth slowed considerably after five months, indicating the logical time to harvest.

After five months, the tilapia which did not receive the bran supplement had increased their weight by a factor of 7.33. The comparable factor for the supplemented fish was 8.89 - 11.11.

For purposes of comparison, Professor Patiño cites Kuronuma (1968) who describes the cage culture of various marine fishes in the fertile Inland Sea of Japan. Kuronuma considered an annual production of 29 kg/m^2 remarkable. These fish were fed a high quality dry food with a conversion ratio of 1.6. In Professor Patiño's experiments, the unsupplemented *T. rendalli*, stocked at 100 fish/cage, produced 28.5 kg/m^2 of pond surface in five months. While no attempt was made to determine the conversion ratio of bore leaves, it was undoubtedly much higher than 1.6. At New Alchemy East we have achieved a good conversion rate of 1.5 with *Tilapia aurea* and *Tilapia zillii*, and believe that part of our success is due to small amounts of animal protein (earthworms, insects, etc.) in their diet, particularly when the tilapia are small (McLarney and Todd, 1974).

"One-upmanship" in terms of weight/surface area data is an occupational disease of fish culture. Undoubtedly the production achieved by Professor Patiño could be bettered by using concentrated foods or by technological improvements. What matters is not competition among fish culturists, but the fact that his technique is inexpensive and does not require great sophistication on the part of the farmer, yet can result in the production of hundreds of kg of fish in a short time within a small area.

INTEGRATION OF FISH CULTURE WITH CULTURE OF HOGS AND CHICKENS

Professor Patiño points out that, while Colombian farmers commonly raise chickens and hogs for sale or their own use, growth of these animals is limited by their diet, consisting chiefly of corn, platano peels, minced sugar cane and table scraps, plus whatever the animal can forage. Such a diet is usually deficient in animal protein. Colombian campesinos cannot afford to make up this deficit by the use of concentrates, as is done in more affluent countries. Professor Patiño suggests that excess small cultured tilapia could fill this gap. For this purpose he recommends *T. mossambica,* which can be maintained without supplemental foods on plankton in fertilized ponds, and multiplies more rapidly than *T. rendalli.* The two species could be grown in polyculture, or a separate small pond could be set aside for *T. mossambica.* The pigs or chickens could be maintained near the fish pond so that the ponds can be fertilized with their manure.

Young *T. mossambica* were tested for acceptability as food for chickens and pigs. The tests on chickens were preliminary and established only that chickens prefer cooked fish. Tests with hogs were more extensive. These animals eagerly accepted whole, raw young *T. mossambica.* They had no difficulty with bones or fin rays.

One quantitative feeding experiment was conducted with hogs. Four one month-old Duroc Jersey hogs were divided into two pairs (one male and one female per pair). The control pair, which had a mean weight of 8.6 kg, was fed twice daily with cooked platanos (including peels) and minced sugar cane, in increasing quantities as the animals grew. The experimental pair, with a mean weight of 7.5 kg, received the same diet, plus a daily ration of whole, raw *T mossambica* measuring up to 8 cm in total length. The daily tilapia ration was 100 g per hog at the start of the experiment and was increased to 250 g over the experimental period.

After four months, the hogs were weighed again. The mean weight of the control animals was 16.5 kg, that of the test animals 24.5 kg, or 33.1 per cent more, even though they had started the experiment being slightly smaller. The mean weight gain of the controls was thus 7.9 kg, or 48 per cent, while the hogs whose diet was supplemented by tilapia had a mean weight gain of 17.0 kg, or 69. 4 per cent.

Professor Patiño does not consider the final weight of either pair of hogs satisfactory, due to irregularities in the feeding regime. Neither can his results be considered statistically significant. Nevertheless, the experiment indicates what might be achieved.

THE "CAMPESINO FISH CULTURE UNIT" AND ITS ECONOMICS

Based on the results of the experiments described here, Professor Patiño has drawn up a plan for a "Unidad Piscicola Campesina" (Campesino Fish Culture Unit), using *T. rendalli,* with the potential to accommodate additional species. The physical layout of such a system is illustrated in Fig. 1.

His plan for the UPC, as he calls it, includes the following instructions:

1. Select a pond site with the help of an expert. New Alchemy's new method of pond sealing should render site selection easier (McLarney and Hunter, see page 85).
2. Plant the area around the pond site with fish food plants. Professor Patiño suggests one hundred stalks of yuca, one hundred roots of bore, chayamansa and other suitable plants as available locally. These need occupy less than ½ hectare. It is important to plant before beginning pond construction, so that the plants are producing by the time the fish need food.
3. Build two ponds:
   a. A nursery pond ("estanque criadero"), 5 m x 20 m x 1 m, connected by a ditch to a good water source, with another ditch for drainage. When filled, the nursery pond should be fertilized. When the water turns green, add five hundred to one thousand juvenile *T. rendalli.*
   b. A growing pond ("estanque para jaulas") near the nursery pond, also provided with inlet and outlet ditches. The growing pond should be at least 3 m x 20 m, and 1.5 m deep. Plant this pond with aquatic plants and introduce twenty-four cages, each measuring 1 m x 1 m x 1 m, spaced equidistantly. Each cage should be equipped with legs to keep it 30 cm off the bottom.
4. When the tilapia start to grow, select individuals 6-8 cm in total length and stock them at 200 per cage. All the cages can be stocked at once, or stocking can be staggered to suit the culturist.
5. Feed the fish in the cages twice daily, in the morning and late afternoon, with leaves of the food plants. Feed as much as the fish will consume, but no more. If feasible, supplement their diet with wheat or rice bran.
6. Inspect each cage monthly to determine if health and growth of the fish are satisfactory. For this purpose, the cages may be lifted slightly so that the quantity of water in them is reduced. They should not be lifted completely out of the water or held up too long, as the fish will become very excited and subsequent losses due to jumping out may occur.
7. Harvest after five months, or when the fish have reached the desired size.

Using the costs reported by campesinos who have built ponds in the vicinity of Mateguadua, and the results of the experiments reported here, Professor Patiño makes the following economic projection (Table 1).

According to Professor Patiño's projection, in the first year, with only one harvest and all of the initial costs of construction, a profit of $1,740 Colombian dollars could be realized. In subsequent years, with harvests up and expenses down, the projected profit would be $10,980 Colombian, with only two harvests per year. To any such evaluation the benefit of in-

TABLE 1: PROJECTED INVESTMENT IN AND INCOME FROM A CAMPESINO FISH CULTURE UNIT

Investment (in $ Colombian):	
Pond construction, with pick and shovel	$ 800
Construction of inlet and drainage ditches	400
Cost of twenty-four cages, at $40 each	960
Food plants	300
Unforeseen costs	540
Total Investment	$3,000
Annual Maintenance Cost:	
(Including repair of cages)	$1,500
TOTAL	$4,500
Income	
Net Production per cage, first year ..... 26 kg	
Production of twenty-four cages, first year ....624 kg	
Value of harvest, first year (assuming a price of $10/kg of fish)	$6,240
Value of the harvest, second year (minimum of two harvests)	$12,480

As of Summer, 1975, $28.50 Colombian was the equivalent of $1.00, U. S. Funds

creased nourishment provided by the fish to the campesino family and to their livestock must be added.

DISCUSSION

Professor Patiño envisions that such ponds could be set up not only on campesino farms, but also "in grammar and high schools, in training schools, vocational agricultural institutes, in SENA, and even in the universities" where they would serve educational, scientific and recreational functions, as well as provide food. He suggests that the crop could be used in school cafeterias or shared among the students. "The development of fish culture should be conceived as a great crusade operating throughout the national educational system," he writes, "How much more useful and functional this type of activities and educational experiences would be than the bland and repetitive textbook instruction which is now given in our centers of education."

I can only add that the need for the type of education and action urged by Professor Patiño extends far beyond Colombia. The lack of effective aquaculture programs in most of Latin America is obvious. Those few which have been proposed or enacted are mostly concerned with taking advantage of long growing seasons and cheap labor supplies to produce a product for export or sale to the relatively affluent, and confer economic benefit only to the entrepreneur and a handful of laborers. A few plans which have taken better aim at the important economic, nutritional and ecological problems have foundered for a variety of reasons – biological bottlenecks, lack of research funds, failure to approach the problem at a level meaningful to the campesino, etc. Professor Patiño has surmounted these problems to design and test a fish culture system that is ecologically and economically sound with great potential to alleviate some of the problems of Latin America.

– Anibal Patiño R.

Précis by William O. McLarney

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