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The Producing Countries

The world's production of farmed shrimp is dominated by developing countries located in the tropical latitudes. Seven countries produced about 86 percent of the farmed shrimp production in 1995 - six Asian and one Latin American. Regionally, Asia produces nearly four-fifths of the world's farmed shrimp output, with Latin American countries providing most of the remainder. Shrimp farms throughout Asia harvested 558,000 tons in 1995, accounting for 78 per cent of the world's farmed shrimp production. By comparison, the shrimp farming industry in the western hemisphere, led by Ecuador's annual output of 100,000 tons, produced a regional total of 154,000 tons. In total, about 712,000 tons of shrimp were produced in farms in 1995, roughly 26 percent of the world's total shrimp production, from by capture fisheries and farming combined, which exceeded 2.6 million tons in 1995. Thailand has been the world's leading producer of farmed shrimp for the past few years, producing 220,000 tons of farmed shrimp in 1995, twice as much as it produced in 1990, and nearly one-third of the world's entire 1995 farmed shrimp production. The people along Thailand's coastline, however, have paid an enormous price in terms of environmental loss, however. With production space along Thailand's coastline now at a premium, there are a number of countries in Latin America and Africa that are being eyed by greedy investors as the "sleeping giants", seen to possess enormous potential for building shrimp farms in the next few years.

2.3. The Consuming Countries

Roughly one third of the global shrimp harvest (from capture and culture) is traded internationally - about 900,000 tons. That's less than one percent of global fisheries production by weight, yet shrimp is the single most valuable seafood product that enters into world trade today. Worth about seven billion dollars a year, shrimp traded internationally contributes about 18 percent of the value of all global fisheries exports, which are valued at about 40 billion dollars a year. The value of shrimp imports into the United States in 1995, for instance (valued at \$2.7 billion), accounted for 40 percent of the value of America's total edible seafood imports. And although farmed shrimp represents about one-quarter of all shrimp harvested each year, it constitutes nearly half of all shrimp traded internationally.

Over 90 percent of all shrimp traded on the international market are consumed by just a few importing countries - Japan, the United States and countries comprising the European Union (EU). Japan and the U.S. are the major consumers of farmed tropical shrimp. While European consumers still prefer cold water species harvested from the wild they are warming to tropical, farm reared shrimp varieties.

While Japan is the largest warm water shrimp importer, the U.S. is the world's leading consumer of shrimp. The U.S. consumes some 600,000 tons round weight, or 360,000 tons processed weight of shrimp each year. This compares to a Japanese consumption of about 318,000 tons (processed weight), while shrimp consumers in the European Union buy close to 200,000 tons (processed weight) annually. Between one-half and two thirds of the shrimp consumed in the U.S. comes from shrimp farms located in Asia and Latin America. Wild caught shrimp makes up the rest, and most of this comes from the US domestic shrimp fishery in the southeastern U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico or from the neighboring Latin American or Caribbean countries.

Shrimp has a high profile with American consumers, due to substantial promotion and advertising by the seafood industry, and growth in demand for farmed shrimp in the short term is expected to be significant. Europe should experience the most substantial long term growth since current low consumption levels of farmed, tropical shrimp have great expansion potential. With an anticipated doubling of farmed shrimp production forecast over the next decade there is justifiable concern that past mistakes made in the stampede to shrimp farming will be replicated as investors rush to profit from this the growing market demand.

Figure 3: World Production of Cultivated Shrimp

Source: UN FAO

Figure 4: U.S. Market for Farmed Shrimp

World production of farmed shrimp in 1995: 712,000 metric tons

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United States imports of farmed shrimp in 1995: 260,000-420,000 metric tons
% of total world production of farmed shrimp imported by U.S.: 36 - 58 %
% of farmed shrimp (compared to wild caught shrimp) on U.S. market in 1995 40 - 65 %

Note: These are approximate figures based on the following statistics and calculations: U.S. supply of all forms of shrimp 1986-95, pg. 75- "Fisheries of the United States, 1995", U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1996. All figures in round weight; Conversion factor - heads-off to round weight - 1.6. Range of figures for farmed shrimp as a percentage of U.S. imports derived from several sources- Bob Rosenberry, personal communication; Shrimp Council - U.S. National Fisheries Institute; Greenpeace research.