



Success Story

AquaFish CRSP: Sustainable Aquaculture and Fisheries for a Secure Future

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Fish Farmers Symposium & Trade Fair In Uganda An Annual Forum Where Fish Farmers Learn and Share

“One can make money from fish farming if it is done right.”

***— Fish Farmer Participant,
2011 Study Tour***

With the annual Fish Farmers Symposium & Trade Fair, fish farmers in Uganda have a unique opportunity to network, learn new skills, and check out the latest in aquaculture equipment and products. Stakeholders all along the aquaculture value chain are invited to attend. In its 4th year, the event is sponsored by the Walimi Fish Farmers Cooperative Society (WAFICOS) with USAID support. AquaFish CRSP helped organize the 2010 and 2011 symposia and related study tours.

The symposium serves as a forum for exchanging information, sharing experiences, and working out practical solutions to current production challenges. An array of technology demonstrations and product displays greet visitors at the concurrently running trade fair where inputs and farmed fish products are also for sale.



WAFICOS member Rhona Buwule of the Edhron Fish Farm pauses for a photo during a pre-harvest pond sampling of tilapia ready for market. She and her husband run a successful family aquaculture business that includes value-added processing of catfish. Photo courtesy of Nelly Isyagi.

One of several fish farmer associations in Uganda, WAFICOS is a successful service model for the Uganda aquaculture sector. Since its creation in 2004, the association has grown to over 300 members mostly from central Uganda. Its membership covers the spectrum of the aquaculture sector — grow-out farmers, fish seed producers and breeders, feed manufacturers, suppliers, processors, extensionists, and researchers. Members have access to technical advisory services, affordable input supplies, and equipment rentals. A major thrust of the Society’s outreach services is the annual symposium/trade fair.

Aquaculture in Uganda has been practiced largely at a subsistence level, with a poorly functioning marketing system. WAFICOS started during a critical transition period when Uganda was turning to aquaculture to fill the gap created by a declining wild fishery unable to keep up with growing supply demands. The need for a rapid scale-up of farmed fish production along with an improved marketing infrastructure presented daunting challenges at all levels of the aquaculture sector. As

WAFICOS has grown in size and services to meet these challenges, it has become a valuable partner in the government’s efforts to build a competitive and profitable aquaculture economy.

USAID initially offered development assistance to WAFICOS through its Fisheries Investment for Sustainable Harvest (FISH) Uganda program, which operated from May 2005 to November 2008. As the lead US partner institution under that program, Auburn University helped WAFICOS start the annual symposium/trade fair event, using it to showcase the FISH program’s model fish farms and production technologies. Since 2009, Auburn University has continued in its organizational



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role under the AquaFish CRSP umbrella. Additional USAID funding in 2010 and 2011 was provided through the LEAD-Uganda project (Livelihoods and Enterprises for Agricultural Development). With AquaFish CRSP and FISH guidance, the symposium/trade fair has developed into a self-sustaining event. WAFICOS is expanding the symposium's focus beyond central Uganda, attracting participants nationwide as well as from the neighboring countries of Kenya and South Africa.



WAFICOS Chairman Paul Ssebinayansi (left) and Executive Committee Member Mary Zaramba (right) preside at the lively 2011 symposium session on "How I Sold my Fish at a Loss." Mrs. Zaramba started with her story on "thousands of dollars" lost in sales, all for a lack of marketing experience when she and other WAFICOS farmers attempted to sell their fish in DR Congo. Photo by Suzanne Njeri, Kenyan Fish Farmer.

By polling symposium attendees about their critical issues, WAFICOS customizes the next year's agenda to address current needs. Among the popular topics that were requested for the 2011 symposium were feeds and feeding guidelines, enterprise budgets, farmer-based value addition and marketing, input requirements, and financing. Along with these topics, the 2011 attendees found the farmer-led discussion, "I sold my fish at a loss," a valuable practical exercise. This session, which moved between laughter and serious discussion, epitomizes the symposium model for networking and experience-based information exchange. Participants shared stories of their mistakes, what they learned, and ideas for steps to take to avoid business failures from fish production to marketing. Farmers and service providers collectively acknowledge this type of dynamic, interactive focus as one of the symposium's most beneficial features.

In 2010, CRSP helped expand the demonstration component to include an optional one-day study tour. To meet a broader range of interests, WAFICOS added two additional tours in 2011. On the tours, participants visit farms, hatcheries, processors, suppliers, and research institutions for demonstrations of production technologies and farmer-based, post-harvest handling and product value addition. Also new in 2011 was a three-day tour for 11 Kenyan farmers, two of whom had attended the symposium. The comments of one farmer illustrate how well the study tours fulfill the WAFICOS capacity building objectives: "I have learnt pond construction, designing

and maintenance. I realize now how pond water depth, productivity and water quality are critical and these remain critical challenges for most upcoming farmers."

The annual symposium events are a key element in the success of the USAID-WAFICOS partnership. Adoption rates of innovative technologies and best management practices presented at the symposia are on the rise as is the improved business status of farmers. Leveraging on the goodwill created by the symposium's accomplishments, WAFICOS has been able to establish strong collaborative relationships with other institutions working to build a sustainable aquaculture sector in Uganda.

For WAFICOS, the "Walimi" in its title (the Swahili word for "farmers") stresses the Society's overall focus on strengthening the structure of the aquaculture sector through fish farmer members and other stakeholders along the value chain. This goal matches with those of AquaFish CRSP to enrich livelihoods by helping small-holder farmers, processors, and other market players to raise fish for food and income. As captured in the words of one enthusiastic farmer participant, "One can make money from fish farming if it is done right."

Symposium Proceedings and reports are at: <http://symposium.x10hosting.com/>



Student interns learning how to seine a pond at the Blessed Investments Ltd fish farm. The young woman pictured here illustrates the success of women in Ugandan aquaculture where their numbers are increasing in farm ownership and skilled positions. Photo courtesy of Nelly Isyagi.

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