

## **Aquaculture: the emerging commodity**

The importance of aquaculture as a source of fish and other aquatic foods increases dramatically. In 2010 global aquaculture production reached a new level, to the extent that the aquacultural farming industry produced more fish, shellfish and aquatic plants than the traditional fishing industry.

Over a number of years the production of aquacultural species increased and marine fishing remained constant or, in some cases, even experienced a decrease. The consistent level of production in certain sectors of the fishing industry is attributed to the fact that it is managed through the application of the principle of maximum sustainability, i.e. the specific source is utilized optimally. In cases where the production levels decrease, it means that the practice is not sustainable. In a South African context, the abalone industry is an example of a source that is not utilized sustainably.

On a continental and global scale South Africa's aquacultural production is relatively small. In 2008 the total aquacultural industry in South Africa measured 3 654 ton in production volume and had a total value of R327 million. Cultivated abalone (934 ton), oysters (289 ton), mussels (500 ton) and trout (943 ton) comprise the largest percentage of production.

The Western Cape leads the production in tonnage with 61% and 83% in value. Most of the farms for the abovementioned species are situated in the Western Cape.

Mussels are only cultivated in Saldanha, with the balance of the consumable product being imported. The current mussel production output of 500 to 600 ton annually, would have to double in order to serve the local market. Local mussel farmers would, however, have to compete with cheaper imports from the East, New Zealand and South America.

It is possible that in five or six years' time abalone production would have increased to double its current output. Expansion of existing farms would initiate new projects, to be managed by people with vast industrial experience.

It appears as if oyster sales have stabilised in the local market. Some producers are developing new foreign markets.

In the local market there is still space for growth for the trout industry, depending on the international market tendencies for salmon and trout. Trout importation is not a viable option. The possibility of marine fin fish production in cage systems and in land-based recirculation systems is being investigated in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Mozambique.

The aquaculture industry experiences positive growth and there are ample opportunities for new farming projects. The most important factor to keep in mind, is the potential market.

Ferdie Endemann, Specialist Agricultural Advisor: Aquaculture, Farmers' Support and Development (FSD) / Institute for Animal Production, [ferdiee@elsenburg.com](mailto:ferdiee@elsenburg.com) 021 808 5218, 071 680 0522