



Live from Idaho

A small-time tilapia farmer speaks about challenges in regulation and shipping to a very niche market.

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US-based Dutchboy Farms may not be a sprawling aquaculture operation - but in the niche market it covers, it is king.

Founder John Lambregts is farming tilapia in trout land; the farms are in Idaho, which is the center of trout and rainbow trout farming in the United States. Lambregts farms trout, as well, but mainly for recreational use. The tilapia, however, is shipped live to Seattle and Portland, Oregon, for ethnic

Chinese marketplaces.

"Probably 85 percent of our product gets consumed live by ethnic Chinese in various markets in the US and Canada," Lambregts tells *Fish Farming International*. "The Chinese prefer to [purchase] fish live in the market. We have very long-term relationships with the buyers."

Lambregts, the heart and soul of Dutchboy Farms, grew up in the Netherlands - hence the company's name - got an undergraduate degree at the University of Oregon, a degree from Texas A&M University in agricultural economics and "got the aquaculture bug" during his first job out of college at an Idaho trout farm.

After seven years in sales and marketing for trout processors, the self-described entrepreneur developed a warm spring in Grace, Idaho, and forayed into tilapia in 1998. He "started

small," and around 2005 stumbled into the fingerling business after the farm developed disease problems and "we were looking for a better fingerling."

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John Lambregts, founder Dutchboy Farms

Lambregts began importing fingerlings from Nam Sai Farms in Thailand and then "a friend said 'would you bring me some in' and then another friend..." he says. "Last month we did 700,000 fingerlings. It's almost a real business."

Nam Sai Farms is one of the largest fingerling producers in the world, Lambregts says, and "the fish we bring in from them

are far, far superior to anything we can get domestically. And it doesn't hurt that they are cheaper." Dutchboy Farms flies them in at 5 weeks and then distributes them.

"We pick them up from one airline and go to another airline and ship them everywhere," he explains.

Companies that do their own sex-reversing use the fingerlings, Lambregts said. For ones that don't, Dutchboy Farms brings in fry and then carries out the process at the farm, shipping them

all over North America to these companies afterwards.

Struggling with trout

While Dutchboy Farms has found its groove in the tilapia industry, it hasn't been so lucky with trout. In the past few years, Lambregts said his company lost three processors as customers - there's now only one processor in Idaho that purchases fish

from independent growers, he says.

"I desperately don't want to go back to processing [in-house] ... so we do mostly recreational trout," he says, adding that the company still has its HAACP certification for processing, but it's "just not the direction we want to take our company."

He prefers to focus commercially on the tilapia - and the company has found "a pretty unique resource" in southeast Idaho. The farm is located near a spring with a flow of about 1,000 gallons a minute and a temperature of 85 degrees Fahrenheit, "which happens to be perfect for tilapia."

The facility uses a single, flow-through raceway system and because of US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rules and regulations, deliberately stays below 50 metric tons of production per year. Once that threshold is crossed, Lambregts says, EPA rules