

# WESTERN MARYLAND RESEARCH & EDUCATION CENTER

MARYLAND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION + AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION

## RURAL ENTERPRISE SERIES

RES-02

### Fee Fishing Enterprise

Fee fishing can provide an attractive recreational opportunity for people who love to fish but lack the time to travel very far to do it, for families with small children, and for the elderly and the physically challenged. Most ponds have a steady base of repeat customers from the local area. Tourists and vacationers may also use the facility because most states do not require people to have a fishing license to fish at a fee-fishing pond. The pond itself is licensed.

The keys to a successful fee fishing operation are providing good fishing, having a good location, knowing your customers, and providing quality facilities. A "good location" is one that is within 50 miles of a large population center, is close to other public attractions, and has good road access, pleasant scenery and surroundings, and plenty of parking.



#### Operational Considerations

The prime season for fee fishing runs from about the beginning of April through the end of October. The peak period is weekends in the spring and fall and early and late summer. Having to be available at these times could cut into your traditional vacation time, so be sure to discuss this aspect with your family before starting up an operation.

Facilities with high quality water in the mid-Atlantic and New England can stock coldwater fish such as trout and offer an extended season. The most common fee fishing pond stock in Maryland is rainbow trout, largemouth bass, bluegill, and catfish. Bass and catfish more easily tolerate variability in water quality than do trout. Most fee fishing facilities buy stock from fish farms.

Concessions can be the most profitable part of a fee fishing operation. Some items that may sell well include drinks, snacks, ice, bait, fishing tackle, newspapers, hats, sunscreen, first aid supplies, and fish cleaning services. (You may need a special permit to run a fish cleaning service.) Many operations also rent fishing gear. Shaded tables and chairs should be available, as well as covered trash cans.

Some enterprises have accommodations for

nonanglers, including playgrounds, campgrounds, and picnic areas.

#### Skills and Time Needed

Every new operation requires time to become successful. Time is needed initially to set up the pond, locate sources of supplies, determine a marketing strategy, and set up other aspects of the business. Along with your hours of operation, long-term pond and fish maintenance must be considered. You will need to monitor specific water quality parameters such as dissolved oxygen twice daily and other parameters weekly or semi-weekly.

Many customers will have little or no experience fishing, and they may look to you or your workers for guidance. The most successful operators are those who enjoy meeting new people. Remember that your product is primarily recreation, not fish. This means that fishing success, aesthetics, security, concessions, safety, and marketing are primary concerns.

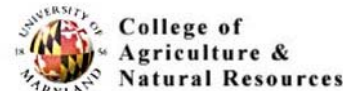
#### Legal, Equipment, and Resource Concerns

If you're digging a new pond, you'll need a number of permits before you begin. You may also need permits to operate a fee fishing enterprise using an existing pond, sell live fish, bait, and food; and construct restrooms.

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Ideally, a fee fishing pond will have gently sloping banks, a smooth even bottom, and easy access for a truck from which to stock fish. A high-water spillway may be needed. Optimum depth is 3 to 5 feet, except in very cold climates, where depth should be 5 to 8 feet to prevent freezing. Irregularly shaped ponds have a more natural feel to them. Trees, shrubbery, or hills should screen roads, buildings, and fences.

Ponds of about one acre are easy to manage, and fishing success is usually good. Ponds larger than 2 acres are difficult to manage for disease and water quality. They may also harbor many fish that are "hook-shy" and basically uncatchable. This reduces fishing success and the number of catchable fish that can be added. Some larger operations have more than one pond. This allows the operator to change fish densities and provides a place to quarantine freshly purchased fish to ensure that they are healthy.

The best water source for a fee fishing pond is a continuously flowing high quality stream or spring. Spring water is best because it allows less chance of contamination or the import of diseased fish. The quality of water will determine what types of fish will flourish in the pond. Your county Cooperative Extension agent can offer advice or suggest whom to talk to.

You should make arrangements for the security of the site. This helps to ensure that there are no unauthorized visitors or vandals. Some ponds are fully fenced in a discrete way. This helps keep visitors out of the private areas of the property. Lighting should be provided if you allow nighttime fishing. Special access accommodations will be needed if you intend to offer fishing for physically challenged people. Having designated paths will cut down on wear and tear on the property. Adequate clean restroom facilities are also a necessity.

Special liability insurance will be needed. Most standard farm insurance policies will not cover the added liability of having paying customers visit your

land. However, you may be able to obtain a rider to your current policy. You should implement risk management techniques to reduce potential hazards and prevent accidents. Swimming and alcohol should be explicitly prohibited. First aid and life-saving equipment should be readily accessible. All grass should be kept mowed to reduce habitat for snakes.

Pond rules should be posted in plain view. You'll need to decide at what age children can fish without supervision, whether you'll allow boats on the pond, what kinds of bait and hooks are allowed, etc.

A fee fishing operation will influence how you use the rest of your land. You need to be careful with pesticides and herbicides if you have a pond full of fish. You also need to spray when visitors are not present. Visitors may complain about excessive noise from other farm operations.



#### Promotional Concerns

The most effective form of advertising for a fee fishing enterprise is a satisfied customer who tells his or her friends about the place. That's why it's so important to provide excellent customer service to everyone. Other common forms of advertising include roadside signs, brochures at visitors'

centers, ads in newspapers and sporting and local magazines, and Web pages and ads on sporting and local tourism Web sites.

You could run occasional promotional events. You might mark some fish and award prizes to people who catch them. Some facilities hold annual fishing tournaments and give prizes for the largest or most fish. Some operators take photos of anglers with particularly large fish or large catches. These can encourage other customers.

The added foot traffic of fishing visitors provides an audience to which to sell fruits, vegetables, or crafts, if you wish to supplement your income.

#### Financial Picture

Price varies widely among fee fishing enterprises.

The first step in determining your price schedule should be to visit your competitors and investigate their pricing structure and policies.

Some operators charge a very low price to fish, but higher prices to keep each fish. Others charge slightly more, but include one keeper fish as part of the fee. In some areas, many customers will not want to keep the fish they catch, so your daily

charge must be high enough to cover the cost of replacing fish that die after being caught and released. You'll need to decide if you'll offer senior citizen or children's discounts, season passes, or group rates.



This budget that follows assumes the following: a 1-acre pond with high-quality water, on a scenic property, within 50 miles of a large population area. No feeding of fish is required. Property taxes are not considered and all profits are before taxes.

A fee fishing enterprise requires a long-term commitment. It can take a few years to build up a loyal clientele. But if you enjoy meeting new people and working with fish, it can be a great way to earn extra money and maybe even get some fishing in yourself!

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### Information Resources

Bogash, S. and J. Kays. 1998. Developing a Fee fishing Enterprise: An Opportunity in Recreational Tourism. University of Maryland-Cooperative Extension FS-754. <<http://www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/Publications/Publication.cfm?ID=93>>.

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Chopak, C. 1992. Promoting Fee fishing Operations as Tourist Attractions. Michigan State University Extension publication E-2409. <<http://www.msue.edu/msue/imp/modtd/33809023.html>>.

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### Authors

Jonathan S. Kays, Regional Extension Specialist,  
Natural Resources

Joy R. Drohan, Faculty Extension Assistant  
Western Maryland Research and Education Center

## Fee-Fishing Enterprise Budget

ITEM (1) VARIABLE COSTS	UNIT	QUANTITY	PRICE/UNIT	TOTAL (\$)
Calfish	pound	800	1	800
Trout	fish	350	2.2	770
Portable toilet	month	7	70	490
Electricity	month	7	10	70
Website ad	year	1	150	150
Advertising	month	7	139	973
Insurance	year	1	500	500
Permit	permit	1	25	25
Labor (10% commission when working)	commission	0.1	1,000.00	100
Bait	dozen	450	1	450
Sodas	each	500	0.25	125
Hotdogs	each	250	0.5	125
Chips	each	250	0.25	63
Mowing	each	10	10	100
Flowers, herbicide, miscellaneous	year	1	100	100
<b>Total variable costs</b>				<b>4841</b>
(2) FIXED/OVERHEAD COSTS		TOTAL COST	YR'LY % OF TOTAL COST	COST/YR
(3) Building (10-year life)		2500	10	250
Landscaping (5-year life)		400	20	80
Gravel (5-year life)		250	20	50
Sign (5-year life)		150	20	30
Fishing poles (5-year life)		80	20	16
Water testing equipment (5-year life)		150	20	30
Used refrigerator (5-year life)		100	20	20
<b>Total fixed costs</b>				<b>476</b>
(3) GROSS INCOME	UNIT	QUANTITY	PRICE/UNIT	TOTAL
Daily fishing fee	person	1500	5	7500
Fish-kept charge (10% of all fishermen)	fish	150	5	750
Bait sales	dozen	450	2	900
Pole rental	unit/day	100	2.5	250
Sodas	each	500	0.5	250
Hotdogs	each	250	1	250
Chips	each	250	0.5	125
<b>Total gross income</b>				<b>10025</b>
<b>Total income over costs</b>				<b>4708</b>
<i>Assumptions:</i>				
1) Owner has an existing 1-acre pond with high water quality.				
2) Property is in a scenic location within 50 mi. of a large population center.				
3) No feeding of fish is required.				
4) Property taxes are not considered.				
5) All profits are before taxes.				
<i>Source:</i> Bogash, S. and J. Kays. 1998. Developing a Fee-fishing Enterprise: An Opportunity in Recreational Tourism. University of Maryland Cooperative Extension, FS-754. <a href="http://www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/Publications.cfm?ID=93">www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/Publications.cfm?ID=93</a> >				