

## Frequently asked questions

Q: *What is the minimum cost of a fish farm venture?*

A: This is determined by the quantity of basic equipment required to make the venture a viable enterprise. Items like containments and associated plumbing, feed and storage, harvesting equipment, and the means to transport the product to market (a vehicle) are all essentials items that can make a micro enterprise uneconomic.

Q: *What are the benefits of planning and drafting a business plan?*

A: Planning is an exercise that allows for mapping out all the project activities, and when well thought out can reveal constraints and challenges that need attention. Often these may be otherwise overlooked and may incur additional costs. In compiling a plan, even the unseen and unexpected costs can be estimated. It is advisable to have the plan reviewed by experts who have practical experience in similar ventures.

Q: *What are the dangers of business plans?*

A: Too many ventures start out with unrealistic business plans that are computer-generated, and often designed to show a projected profitable business on the basis of 'scaling up' a micro enterprise or pilot project. Beware of business plans that use spread-sheets that automatically make a venture look profitable by simply altering the capital, input or running costs. The hidden costs and unexpected expenses have caused many seemingly viable ventures to fail. A practical plan, drafted and planned on paper, although less appealing than computer-generated spreadsheets of projected costs and profits, is a better option. We advise you to be cautious and conservative in estimating yields and expenses.

Q: *What are the basic pillars of a sound aquaculture venture?*

A: The market for the product that you are developing must be assured, or in the least must have been researched (estimated) in terms of demand. The technology for culturing the fish must be available and affordable. The venture must be based on a sound business plan. And the people who run the venture must have the relevant expertise.

Q: *What is the 'bottom line' in any business plan?*

A: The ultimate goal is to make a profitable business! Therefore, the most fundamental aspect must be that the venture be market oriented. If you cannot be certain of selling the product at a good return, it does not matter how successful you are at producing it. Too many aquaculture ventures start out based on the primary question 'How to produce the product?' rather than considering 'Is there a demand for it?'

Q: *In planning an aquaculture venture, can it be a part-time or side-line activity to other occupations?*

A: In practice this occurs very rarely! Like any other intensive livestock production, fish culture is dependent on the care that the fish receive in terms of the environmental conditions in which they are grown. But, unlike most terrestrial-based farming of sheep, goats, cattle, etc., the 'housing' facilities have to provide all the fish's environmental needs, including the maintenance of good conditions in terms of ponds, tanks and the water quality within them. If these conditions are sub-optimal you may run the risk of losing the entire stock, especially towards harvest time when crowding and fish size create the highest density. Constant supervision and care and a degree of technical expertise are required to manage a facility. For example, fish suffering from lack of oxygen due to overcrowding or poor water quality will die within a few hours. Conditions need to be monitored and follow-up action needs to be prioritized to ensure that problems are dealt with, urgently.

