REQUEST FOR PRE-PROPOSALS

Please Copy and Distribute to All Interested Parties

The USDA-NIFA Southern Regional Aquaculture Center solicits response from qualified multi-state teams interested in participating in the regional project:

Proper Catfish Fingerling Transport and Pond Acclimation

SRAC's Board of Directors has authorized up to $250,000 for a 2-year project on *Proper Catfish Fingerling Transport and Pond Acclimation*. This project will be developed using the "comprehensive method" where a team of multi-state scientists having demonstrated records of expertise in the subject complete a single pre-proposal that addresses all project objectives. One proposal will be selected for funding based on review by a committee of scientists not involved in any of the proposals that are submitted. No funds are currently obligated or authorized by USDA NIFA and therefore no awards will be made in this RFP cycle until SRAC receives the funds from USDA. The RFP may be withdrawn or start dates delayed based on timing of USDA NIFA funding.

Background

Producers receiving catfish fingerlings often have significant mortalities within a few days after fish are hauled and stocked. Despite extensive research on the alleviation of stress on fish during hauling, the results of those studies have not been widely adopted by industry. Fingerlings are often stocked in the summer when water temperatures are high. Cooling fingerlings to well water temperatures for transport, only to acclimate them quickly to pond temperatures for stocking, also results in stress. Consequently, fingerlings may be delayed in returning to feed, slowing growth. Incidences of disease in fingerlings have also been reported by farmers immediately following hauling and stocking into production ponds. Losses attributed to loading, hauling and acclimation stress have resulted in few detectable fingerlings in ponds, resulting in substantial financial losses to the producer.

Objectives

1. Evaluate loading and hauling practices (including amendments) that improve fingerling survival and performance during and after hauling.
2. Examine the optimal oxygen levels in hauling tanks (aluminum and fiberglass) with venting or off-gassing vs. no venting/off-gassing.
3. Examine fingerling health at the beginning and end of hauling to determine the effects of survival.
4. Determine the ideal acclimation time for fish at various hauling and pond temperature differences.

Experimental Approach

Hauling research should be conducted in equipment currently in use by the catfish industry (actual hauling tanks and not simulations in laboratory tanks or aquaria) and reflect hauling and acclimation times experienced by most producers.

How to Respond

Pre-proposals must address all objectives. Preference will be given to pre-proposals that show a high degree of collaboration and coordination among participants. To meet the criterion for a regional project, the pre-proposal must include collaboration from scientists in two or more states or territories in the Southern Region (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Virginia).

The pre-proposal must include a one-page vita for each participant and a proposed budget for each participating institution or organization. Pre-proposals, vitae, and budgets that are not in the proper format will not be considered. (See "Guidelines for Writing a SRAC Pre-Proposal (Comprehensive)" file attached or contact Kristen Walters with the SRAC office at 662-686-3269.)

Send an electronic copy of the pre-proposal in Word format to Jimmy Avery, SRAC Director as an email attachment (jimmy.avery@msstate.edu) by **July 1, 2025**. Proposals received after that date will not be considered.