U.S. farm-raised catfish is the ninth most popular item of all fish and seafood products consumed in the United States. Americans eat 15.5 pounds of fish and seafood per person per year, and each American eats 0.56 pounds of U.S. farm-raised catfish annually.

Alabama ranks fourth in U.S. aquaculture (including catfish) sales, at $172 million. In 2016, the U.S. farm-raised catfish industry produced 363 million pounds of catfish from 63,040 acres of water. Alabama produced 120 million pounds from 17,450 acres representing 33 percent of all catfish produced in the United States from 28 percent of the total U.S. catfish industry acreage. The average Alabama catfish production is 6,135 pounds per acre per year.

Total U.S. catfish industry producer income in 2016 was $380 million and Alabama’s producer income was $130 million or 34 percent of the entire U.S. catfish industry.

Two catfish processing plants are located in western Alabama: one in Uniontown (Perry County) and one in Eutaw (Greene County). There are two catfish feed mills in western Alabama: Uniontown (Perry County) and Demopolis (Marengo County).

The 2016 Economic Impact of the Farm-Raised Catfish Industry to Alabama, including catfish production, feed manufacturing, and processing, reports the following:

- Total output (sales) $465 million
- Total employment 2,626 (Jobs)
- Total value added $139 million

Alabama Catfish Industry Faces Serious Issues

In the early 2000s, more than 25,000 water acres were in production in Alabama, including approximately 250 catfish farms in western Alabama and four processors. By 2016, this declined to 77 farms; 17,450 water acres; and two remaining catfish processors in the state.

Why the decline?

- **Feed prices:** A dramatic surge (140 percent) in feed prices from $201 per ton in 2000 to $482 per ton in 2014.
- **Competition:** Inexpensive imports (mainly from Vietnam and China) flooded the U.S. marketplace with alternative catfish-like products, such as tra, swai, and basa as well as tilapia.
- **Other economic forces:** The great recession and a decline in catfish demand have significantly reduced the size of the catfish industry in Alabama and the rest of the United States.
- **Disease losses:** Annual production losses have been greater than $12 million annually over the last 10 years due to bacterial diseases, representing the biggest challenge to the Alabama catfish industry. Losses have been particularly heavy due to a virulent strain of *Aeromonas hydrophila* bacteria introduced from China.
- **Fish size:** Included in the harvest recently have been excessive amounts of large fish too big for the processor to accept.
Mary Quitman Holmes, who farms in Perry County, was named Alabama’s Catfish Farmer of the Year in 2017. (Photo credit: Debra Davis, Alabama Farmers Federation)

David’s Catfish House of Atmore, Alabama, won the 2017 Bama’s Best Catfish Restaurant Award. From left are Catfish Farmers of America President Townsend Kyser, David’s Catfish owners Elliott and Rob Faircloth, Alabama Catfish Producers Chairman Sid Nelson, Absolutely Alabama host Fred Hunter, and Alabama Farmers Cooperative’s Jim Allen. (Photo credits: Debra Davis [top] and Marlee Moore [left], Alabama Farmers Federation)

Terry Hanson, Extension Specialist; Professor; Luke Roy, Extension Specialist; and Bill Hemstreet, Extension Advisor, Natural Resource Program, School of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Aquatic Sciences, all with Auburn University

For more information, contact your county Extension office. Visit www.aces.edu/directory.

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