

## How to Get Started in Aquaculture in Georgia

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A wide variety of aquatic species are cultured in Georgia in both freshwater and saltwater. Aquaculture is being considered as an alternative land use in Georgia. The climate and available ground water are suitable for many fish and crustacean species.

Select the species you want to culture by studying the available information and investigating the possibilities for sales of that species. Aquaculture success requires that the producer play the major role in marketing the product they produce. So, before an aquaculture species is selected, potential sales must be made in order to identify product type and price. Without this information, a facility cannot be properly designed.

Permits (see website under Regulations below):

Since 1992, most fish farms in Georgia have had only one permit, the **Aquaculturist Registration**. However, depending on the type and size of the aquaculture enterprise more permits may be required. The Aquaculture Registration issued by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources covers Aquaculturists producing and selling or reselling domestic fish. “Domestic fish” are lawfully obtained farmed fish which are held in confinement in private ponds and must be species that are indigenous to Georgia or were recognized before 1992 as having established populations in Georgia public waters. A notable exception is white perch (*Morone americana*). The Aquaculture Registration covers the commercial fish hatchery license, the wholesale fish dealer’s license, or retail fish dealer’s license for domestic fish. Certain “paper trail” documents must be maintained by the registered Aquaculturist such as bill of sale with number, weight or average length information. This registration is not required of grocery stores. It must be renewed every two years.

Other licenses include the “Catch-Out Pond License”, “Commercial Fish Hatchery License,” and “Fish Dealers License,” also managed by the Department of Natural Resources to regulate the sale of wild or game fish species in Georgia. Since some of these permits overlap in definition, it is best to contact the state office of the Fisheries Division of the Department of Natural Resources to avoid duplication. For example if you had a Commercial Fish Hatchery license, you may not need a Fish Dealers License. Each of these licenses requires a fee to be paid.

A “Wild Animal License” is also available for possession, sale, purchase, transport, import, or transfer of any wild animal including exotic fish. The exception for exotic fish is when they are in containers which has water that is discharged through a filtering system capable of removing all fish and fish eggs and is disposed of in a septic tank permitted by the county or in a waste water treatment system permitted by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division. Notably, rainbow trout, brown trout, common carp, goldfish, and fathead minnows are non-native fish that are not considered exotic. Also, no permit is required to purchase triploid grass carp from wild animal dealers licensed by the state of Georgia as long as the buyer retains a bill of sale and the grass carp are stocked into a private pond.

Currently the “National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit” is required of facilities that raise large quantities of coldwater or warmwater fish. Coldwater facilities that produce a discharge at least 30 days per year must be permitted unless they produce less than 9,090 kilograms (about 20,000 lbs) and feed less than 2,272 kilograms (about 5,000 lbs) of food each year. Warmwater facilities that discharge at least 30 days per year must be permitted unless they are closed ponds that discharge only in periods of excess runoff or produce less than 45,454 kilograms (about 100,000 lbs) of aquatic animals per year.

An “Agricultural Water Use Permit” may be required if ground water withdrawals are 100,000 gallons per day or more on a monthly average. Farm pond or farm impoundment uses for fish, wildlife, recreation or other farm uses are exempted. Farm uses include irrigation of recreational turf and processing perishable agricultural products except in certain areas such as the Chattahoochee River watershed upstream from Peachtree Creek and the counties of Chatham, Effingham, Bryan, and Glynn. Contact the Division of Environmental Protection for exact requirements. This permit does not require a fee.

A “Trout Waters - Approval to Impound or Discharge” permit issued by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Water Protection Branch in order to control the elevation of temperature in Secondary Trout Waters by 2oF or less and to no increase in Primary Trout Waters. No fee is required for this permit.

The Georgia Department of Agriculture requires that aquaculture enterprises as well as other agriculture conduct activities consistent with Best Management Practices established by the Department. The practices are defined in the publication “Agricultural Best Management Practices for Protecting Water Quality in Georgia.” The Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission distributes this publication.

Saltwater aquaculture activities may be regulated by the Coastal Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources. The permits available include the “Commercial Fishing License and Commercial Fishing Boat License” for saltwater fish and shrimp and the “Master Collecting Permit” for oysters and clams.

The Department of Agriculture also offers “Wholesale Fish Dealers License” for persons or corporations who sell fish or seafood to any kind of retail dealer. The “Processing Facilities License” is authorized by the Georgia Food Act and allows the Department of Agriculture to inspect processing facilities. “Mobile Sales License” covers any vehicle from which retail sales of fresh or frozen seafood, meat, poultry, and other foods take place.

Federal “404 and Section 10 Permits” are required by aquaculturists who build in navigable waters. If dredging or filling waters including wetlands are planned, the 404 permit is required. It is notable that a “State Water Quality Certification” is required from the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Water Protection Branch before the US Army Corps of Engineers will take final action on 404 or Section 10 permits. The application is sent to the EPD automatically during the Corps review process for State Water Quality Certification. Aquaculture includes more than 20 species of aquatic animals and plants today. More restrictive regulations may be applied by the county where the aquaculture activity is planned. Also, contact the US Army Corps of Engineers whenever pond construction will impact a stream or wetland.

## Pond Construction:

Pond construction has become a highly regulated activity in Georgia since 2006 when the US Army Corps of Engineers joined with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to expand regulating guidelines for pond construction and pond site maintenance. Whenever a pond is constructed, especially when water impoundment will impact a ditch, stream, or wetland, contact the NRCS office in your county for assistance so that your course of action can be determined.

1. Contact your NRCS representative prior to starting construction of a pond.
2. If needed, complete a Farm Pond Exemption Information Paper (GAENG-378-EX1) to NRCS. Also, submit to the US Army Corps of Engineers for agreement.
3. Contact the EPD Watershed Protection Program when constructing ponds near streams that contain trout.
4. Plan to use erosion control measures during dirt excavation. The "Manual for Erosion and Sediment Control in Georgia" describes necessary activities at the website, [gaswcc.georgia.gov](http://gaswcc.georgia.gov).
5. When a proposed dam is over 25 feet tall or your pond has 100 acre-feet storage or more, you must work with the Georgia DNR EPD Safe Dams Program.
6. When pumping water from surface water sources, Georgia DRN EPD Water Withdrawal Permitting Program may require an Agricultural Water Withdrawal Permit.
7. Contact the Local Issuing Authority, if applicable. See a list by county at: [http://www.gaepd.org/Files\\_PDF/techguide/wp/ordsum2.pdf](http://www.gaepd.org/Files_PDF/techguide/wp/ordsum2.pdf).

Institutions with assistance for aquaculture enterprises:

University of Georgia

[www.caes.uga.edu/commodities/animals/aquaculture](http://www.caes.uga.edu/commodities/animals/aquaculture)

Fort Valley State University

<http://past.fvsu.edu/about/external-affairs/cooperative-extension/aquaculture>

Resources:

<https://srac.tamu.edu/>

Southern Regional Aquaculture Center fact sheets on aquaculture topics and species specific technical information.

Regulations:

<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/731>

Georgia Department of Natural Resources discussion of aquaculture permits.