

To Russia with love

GEORGE NEWS - The opening of a fish farm on 18 February this year by Russian President Vladimir Putin in a remote location in Siberia, is a milestone for a small George company - Aquaculture Insight (Pty) Limited.

The company designed and manufactured the plant, and then shipped it out in complete kit form from their factory in George. The R12-million farm is the first of six *Tilapia (Carp etc) farms to go up in Siberia.

The Russian project represents the second big breakthrough for Heiner Dominick, Uwe Dominick and Philip Barnard, the company owners, and their team of designers and aqua culturists.

Their first step towards penetrating the European market came when a German company ordered a kit, and it is now a model farm where prospective investors and farmers can familiarise themselves with a plant that is 100% manufactured in South Africa, and most of it right here in George.

Company director Heiner Dominick said an order has been placed for a (15 ton a month) Tilapia farm for the town Gera, in Saxony Germany, for completion this year. On top of this, 11 farms have been ordered for Kirschau a town near the East Germany borders in the Saxony province. "The breakthrough for our company Aquaculture came when our design and our stand was noticed at EuroTier - the world's largest trade exhibition - where we received a firm order and many leads to follow up."

Over 2000 innovators exhibit at EuroTier where trends are set for animal husbandry. (The next EuroTier with BioEnergy Decentral will be held in Hanover from 11 to 14 November 2014). The German customers liked the easy to manage design concept, the relatively low start-up costs needed, and the energy efficient way of operating which sees virtually no waste water being produced. The water is re-circulated, with the waste water being utilised for hydroponics (if so desired).

Russian adventure

The successful completion of the Russian farm was a major triumph for Aquaculture. "We had to ship out the kit-farm (complete with fibre glass tanks and PVC piping) to Siberia, and make sure that every bolt and nut was there ready for assembling. Being in a remote location, meant that there simply was no room for error. We also had to be present when it docked, to ensure that it was loaded onto a truck and driven 1200km to Slodkovia, the location where the Tilapia plant was erected, in a temperature of minus 39 degrees Celsius. The inside of the building is fortunately 28 degrees Celsius," said Heiner.

Good wicket

The directors are hoping that a breakthrough in South Africa is now on the cards, as they are currently well underway with the erection of a cob fish farm in the Eastern Cape town of Hamburg, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Forestry (DAF).

In yet another venture, a business plan has been drawn up for a mega-farm cultivating/producing salmon and trout in the Garden Route region.

"We're looking at producing 400 tons of trout and salmon a year. The Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and other formalities are being dealt with, and George Municipality's LED Chief Carli Venter is supporting this venture," said Heiner during an interview with the George Herald.

This is not bad for a company that was only registered in 2010. Other projects include a crayfish holding facility in South Africa; a Catfish re-circulating system for Namibia; Mega-fish re-circulating system for Nigeria and Tilapia re-circulating system for Malawi and Mozambique.

Speaking at the George factory, where two model tanks holding giant Pangasia fish and Catfish are on display for viewing by prospective customers, the directors explained that the beauty of the system is that it produces 550g to 850g fish within seven months from the egg stage.

What excite our businessmen most, is the fact that they are part of a growing industry that offers solutions to the ever increasing threat of our oceans being totally depleted of marine resources through over-fishing.

Director Philip Barnard, a qualified aqua culturist is frustrated though by the cumbersome red-tape that hampers the start-ups in South Africa. "Quite frankly it is easier for us to do business elsewhere than in our own country." The BEE regulations, supply chain issues, freeing up of government money, and lack of inter-governmental communication has so far led to Aquaculture in South Africa failing completely."

He added, "Getting any mariculture ventures off the ground in this region is difficult from a typographical point of view. Although the Gouritz River basin and Breede River basins are potentially well situated, the other areas along the South coast are not easily accessed because of the high sand dunes, therefore our company strategy is focuses on developing the trout and salmon freshwater sector in the George region."

The directors say that they had developed a production method to purge the fish of its so called 'mud taste', and this should help to change South African's traditional non-freshwater fish eating stance.

In the meantime Western Cape Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, Alan Winde's red-tape busting unit has promised to help speed up the time-frames pertaining to obtaining permission to conduct aquaculture farming in the province. It has the potential for providing employment and food security, and is said to be the fastest growing sector in the food production division of the economy at a rate of between 8 to 10 percent.

*According to Wikipedia Tilapia is the common name for nearly a hundred species of cichlid fish from the tilapiine cichlid tribe. Tilapia are mainly freshwater fish, inhabiting shallow streams, ponds, rivers and lakes, and less commonly found living in brackish water.



The assembly team that travelled to Slodkovo, Siberia to assemble the RAS (Re-circulating Aquaculture System) that produces 16 ton per month *Tilapia Nilauticus* and 200 ton per annum. The team is from back left, Gary Dalbock, Dale Bernard, Heiner Dominick, Patrick Probart and Hennie Bouwer. Front, Johnathan Birkholtz and Colin Fockens.

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