

Indiana Welcomes Matthew Smith, OSU's New Extension Aquaculture Specialist, to the Region

By Amy Stinton

The Indiana Aquaculture Association is excited to welcome our regions newest Aquaculture Extension Specialist, Matthew Smith. Matt was hired earlier this year to fill the vacancy left when Dr. Laura Tiu took a position with University of Florida-Sea Grant. I first had the opportunity to meet Matt this past winter at the Ohio Aquaculture Association Conference. At that point in time Matt had accepted the position but had not officially started. He moved up from Arkansas in March and jumped into his new position with both feet. Matt is enthusiastic about extension and has found that Ohio has a lot going on. He described the process of acclimating to his new role "like drinking water out of a fire hose."



Matt came to Ohio with more than just enthusiasm for aquaculture extension. He had already gotten his feet wet doing extension in Lonoke, Arkansas. His position in Arkansas was working as a Fish Health Associate for the Aquaculture and Fisheries Center of the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff (UAPB). For those of us who are not familiar with Lonoke, it is accepted by

many to be the home of the most diverse sector of the aquaculture industry in the United States. It was in Lonoke that Matt experienced the rapid response to the needs of Arkansas producers. Although he was working in the fish disease lab, his job went beyond fish health issues. He also got to assist with extension and farmer-friendly research looking at feeding trials, predation, toxic hydrogen sulfide reduction, testing triploid larva, new species, and alternative culture methods.

Matt's time in Arkansas actually started before he got the job at UAPB. Matt had moved to Arkansas, the birthplace of warm water aquaculture in the United States (<http://aad.arkansas.gov/aquaculture/Pages/default.aspx>), after he completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries Management from Auburn. To obtain his B.S. degree from Auburn University, Matt was required to take an introductory to aquaculture class. He discovered he had an interest in aquaculture and signed up for the advanced aquaculture class as an elective. This advanced class compared and contrasted warm water aquaculture in Southern Vietnam and West Alabama. The class toured farms, feed mills, and processing plants in both Southern Vietnam and West Alabama. While completing the aquaculture course, it became clear to him that he wanted to go into the field of aquaculture. He had found his passion. So with B.S. degree in hand, experience working as a fish technician at Auburn's main

aquaculture station, volunteer experience working at a local community college helping with their aquaculture program, and the knowledge that he wanted to pursue a future in aquaculture, Matt left Alabama and headed for Arkansas.

Matt moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas to get his Master's Degree in Aquaculture and Fisheries at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. His winter golden shiner research projected compared traditional levee pond production to small experimental split ponds. Split ponds were used for commercial production of catfish but had not been commercially accepted by producers of alternative species. During Matt's time in Arkansas he started building his understanding and appreciation of Extension's role in the industry. The more time he spent at UAPB the more he realized that he enjoyed fish farming and had a special interest in true extension work.

Matt believes that his time spent studying, living and working in Arkansas will be a great benefit for him and our region's industry. He was fortunate to have had the opportunity to work in state with a lot of large-scale commercial farms. He brought that understanding of the business with him and plans to promote full-scale commercial aquaculture in Ohio.

Ohio and the region as a whole have a couple of big hurdles that Matt has identified. One is the need of a processing plant. Right now many of our farmers are selling live or iced product. For the region to move towards larger scale production of food fish we will need to have processing capabilities. The other hurdle is education. There are some basic concepts such as water quality, hauling, and basic practices that need to be strengthened. Matt is looking forward to partnering with county extension educators to put on workshops addressing the industry's educational needs. The first workshop that Matt will be putting on is a Water Quality Workshop for fish farmers. The workshop was scheduled for Saturday, August 6th. One of the great things about this workshop is that there was hands-on training along with lecture. Participants learned how to identify water quality and aquatic weed problems.



The flyer for the "Water Quality Workshop for Fish Farmers" is presented on a dark grey background with a red header. The header text reads "OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION". Below this, the title "Water Quality Workshop for Fish Farmers" is displayed in white. A sub-header in smaller white text says "Join us to learn about the importance of water quality management:". To the right of this text is a small photograph showing a long, narrow, shallow channel filled with water, likely used for aquaculture. Below the photograph, there is a block of small white text providing details about the workshop, including that participants will receive lunch and an informational fish drive, and that the workshop will include PowerPoint lectures and hands-on work.

The Water Quality Workshop is the first event that Matt has scheduled. There are several other projects in the pipeline but he is waiting for responses on funding. After talking with Matt, it is clear that there will be more valuable workshops in the future. If you are interested in workshops offered at OSU there are three avenues for staying informed: OSU

will post events on their website, Facebook, and their list serve. If you want direct email notification of events Matt suggests subscribing to at least one of their four list serves.

Other projects on Matt's radar are to build a mobile aquaponics unit for education and outreach,, encourage more farmers to check their water quality more frequently, encourage annual water source testing and increase interest in a newly

established newsletter. The first issue of the Buckeye Aquaculture Newsletter is already in circulation and can be found at <https://southcenters.osu.edu/aquaculture/extension/education>. The Buckeye Aquaculture Newsletter will be distributed throughout the Aqua-Ohio list serve.

Since Matt's arrival in Ohio, he has taken on a couple of additional roles. Matt serves as a technical-extension committee member for NCRAC, an ex-officio board member for the Ohio Aquaculture Association, a member of the Hocking College fish management and aquaculture advisory committee, and has been asked to be on the Aquatic Nuisance committee for the National Aquaculture Association.

Now anyone who knows me knows that I can rarely resist the opportunity to ask a fish head what his or her favorite fish is. It is not that a person's favorite fish reveals deep insight into who they are, but it is a moment to hear about another person's passion. So what is Matthew Smith's favorite fish to work with? Drum roll please.... It is bait fish and more specifically the golden shiner. Matt enjoys the challenge of raising baitfish. It is not a fish that is raised in an intensive high-density situations but it is a fish raised at lower densities that requires a lot of marketing effort. The producer is not just a fish farmer, but a fish hauler, marketer, and sales person. He likes the various challenges and responsibilities that go along with the job of raising baitfish.

Matt is Ohio's only Extension Aquaculture Specialist and one of a handful or so in our 12-state region. It was clear that Matt has a passion and ambition for aquaculture as a whole. We are lucky to have him in our region. Although he is based at the Ohio State University, his door is open to us as well. He would be happy to take your calls and answer your questions. And as he said, if he cannot answer your question he will find the person that can. If you have a question for Matt you can email him at smith.11460@osu.edu or call him at 740-289-2071 ext. 121. If you are interested in subscribing to one of the OSU list serves let Matt know and he can have your email added to the list.

I would like to personally thank Matt for taking the time to be interviewed. Thank you Matt and welcome to the Midwest. We would also like to extend our thanks to Sarah Strausbaugh for providing photos for the article. Thank you Sarah.