

Red Claw “Lobsters” Thrive In Freshwater Ponds

Some people call them freshwater lobsters, but to Tim Miller and Ken Thompson, partners in Central Kentucky Aquatics, LLC, they're red claw crayfish. And they're the latest new “crop” in the fast-growing business of aquaculture.

Red claw “lobsters” are native to northern Australia and southeastern Papua New Guinea. They are currently being widely raised commercially in Australia and, Thompson says, they're well-suited for commercial production in the U.S.

Only a handful of commercial aquaculture producers in the U.S. have tried raising red claw, but Miller says they've reported prices of \$6 to \$10 per lb. when sold in live seafood markets. Larger animals usually bring more per pound. Male red claw fed a 22 percent protein diet can grow to five to the pound in a feeding period of just 120 days or so, while females average 7 to the pound. Some red claws do grow to over a pound.

Characteristics that make red claw production attractive include tolerance of a wide range of water temperatures, although 75 to 80 degrees F seems best, and the ability to withstand crowding, something freshwater prawns do not like. Red claws are not as territorial as other crustaceans, and seldom eat each other. They are less likely to burrow than other crawfish species and when they do, it's in deeper water, so they don't damage dams or levees. They are not subject to disease like some species, so Thompson says even a novice at aquaculture can produce them. And finally, they have no free-swim-

ming larval stage, as do most commercially produced crustaceans. That means the producer can raise his own replacements, rather than having to buy larvae from a hatchery. In fact, you could produce 10,000 juveniles (enough to stock a 1-acre growing pond) with as few as 30 females. However, the hatchery technology still needs to be looked at more closely to evaluate the economics and feasibility.

Thompson currently recommends a commercial shrimp pellet (35 percent crude protein) for indoor tank culture, since it is readily available to aquaculturists and contains all their nutritional requirements. Red claw grown in outdoor ponds can be fed a lower (22 percent protein) diet which is relatively inexpensive (\$500 per ton) compared to other grow-out feeds.

Thompson estimates that net income from red claw production could be as high as several thousand dollars per acre after costs for purchase of juveniles, feed, and electricity. These figures could vary greatly and assume that the farmer already has a 1-acre pond, 1-hp electric aerator, and their own labor. A farmer's profits can substantially increase if he or she can produce their own seedstock during the winter months. Red claw production requires about 30 minutes per day (two separate feedings) to feed a one-acre pond.

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Red claw “lobsters” are widely raised commercially in Australia and are well suited for commercial production in the U.S., says Central Kentucky Aquatics.



A one-acre pond of red claw lobsters requires about 30 minutes of labor per day (two separate feedings).



Robert and Lee Rottinghaus converted their Buffalo 8-row rigid stalk chopper to a 16-row model with a 40-ft. toolbar and heavy 12-in. coil springs.

8-Row Stalk Chopper Converted To 16-Row “Spring Cushion” Model

“We were bending and breaking a lot of blades on our Buffalo 8-row rigid stalk chopper. We also wanted to cover more acres in the field. So we converted the machine to a 16-row model with a 40-ft. toolbar and heavy 12-in. coil springs,” say Robert and Lee Rottinghaus, Jesup, Iowa.

The chopper was originally equipped with 8 rolling choppers. They remounted them on a used 40-ft. folding toolbar off a cultivator along with 8 new Buffalo choppers. They took thirtytwo 12-in. coil springs from an old cultivator and mounted them on heavy duty brackets that they made out of 3 by 3, 1/8-in. thick angle iron. The brackets clamp onto the toolbar. The chopper units are installed at a 20-degree angle, just like on the original machine, to improve the cutting action.

“We used it this fall for the first time on about 1,500 acres of ridge-tilled corn stalks.

It worked good,” says Robert. “We used our Case IH 200 hp front wheel assist tractor to pull it and it had plenty of power. Going at 12 mph we were able to cover about 50 acres per hour. Originally the chopper units mounted rigidly under the machine's 7 by 7 toolbar, which put a lot of weight and pressure on the blades whenever they hit a rock. The springs solve that problem. The massive support brackets we made for the springs added 1,200 lbs. of weight which improves the stalk cutting by the chopper units. We had to replace the toolbar's original 4-in. dia. hydraulic wing lift cylinders with 5-in. ones in order to handle all the extra weight.”

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A length of 4-in. wide channel iron on bucket is pointed inward at one end. It bites into roots so that Johnson can raise the bucket and lift trees and brush out.

Bucket-Mounted “Brush Buster”

“I tried using the bucket on my skid loader to dig out roots on trees and brush, but I wasn't having any luck. So I mounted a length of 4-in. wide channel iron on the bucket that's pointed inward at one end. It bites into the roots so that I can raise the bucket and lift the trees and brush out,” says Larry Johnson, Ontario, N.Y.

To form the inverted point, he cut a 45 degree angle into two pieces of angle iron and then welded them together onto the end of the channel iron. The bottom end of the channel iron extends 8 in. in front of the bucket and is held in place by a piece of flat steel that slips under the bottom of the bucket. He welded two pieces of flat steel onto the sides of the top part of the channel iron, which rest on top of the bucket. A pair of welded-on brackets fit under the lip at the top edge of

the bucket to keep the channel iron from tipping up. A small piece of welded-on channel iron extends between the two pieces of flat steel. A vise grips is used to hold the bracket to the flat irons.

“It lets me push under the trunk of the brush and bite into the roots. When I just used the bucket, it would slip up over the roots without grabbing,” says Johnson. “Once the channel iron bites into the roots, I raise the bucket until the skid loader's rear wheels come off the ground. Then I rock the bucket back and forth until the brush pops out of the ground. It'll work on trees up to 6 in. in diameter as long as the root system is shallow.”

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