



HISTORY OF SALMON FARMING

Salmon farming in British Columbia finds its roots in finfish aquaculture programs started by the federal government as far back as the 1850s. For many years, government fisheries department engaged in raising different species in hatcheries and then releasing them to the ocean – but by the mid-1930s, the lack of success for some of these programs caused many to close. A continuing enhancement program continues still though, with the support of volunteers and government.

Salmon farming operations – which begin in hatcheries on land like the enhancement programs do - first started in Canada in the early 1970s. Farms were initially established on the Sunshine Coast, and for the first 15 years of salmon aquaculture, there wasn't much growth in the business. Farmers were busy learning about how to farm fish: which fish were best to farm, how to finance the operations throughout the two-three year lifecycle, and what the best feeding process was. As these lessons were learned and more expertise was gained, the industry began to grow – seeing the most of its expansion in the mid-1980s through to the mid-1990s, through which time there were also many failed enterprises and significant merging among companies. The number of farm site had risen from dozens to 121.

In the early days of the industry, farms were run largely as small scale operations, with small businesses, or even families, running individual sites. As regulation and standards increased however, the capital requirements became too costly for many of those businesses to survive. This led to more companies taking charge of multiple farm sites- and continued convergence through the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. Today, the large majority of farms in BC are run by three companies with head offices in Campbell River, BC. The BC Salmon Farmers Association also represents some of the small-size farm companies as well as companies in the supply and service sector.

Over the years, farmers have found more productive locations in more remote areas along Vancouver Island's coasts. Originally, farmers raised Chinook, Coho and Sockeye, but with time, the Atlantic salmon became the primary farmed species. Because it is a hearty salmon with high feed conversion rates and a more docile temperament, the Atlantic is now farmed in 95 per cent of BC's finfish aquaculture operations

Now, there are 130 farm sites in BC – with between 75 and 80 on average operating at any given time.

BC's finfish aquaculture industry is now the province's largest seafood commodity and the country's largest salmon producer, harvesting roughly 76,000 metric tonnes each year.

Sources:

Robson, Peter; Salmon Farming: The Whole Story, 2006

Watson, Dr. Tom; Questions and Answers on Salmon Aquaculture in British Columbia, 2011