Integrating Smart Technologies in Fish Farming

Md Shadab Alam*, Arpit Acharya, Brundaban Sahu and Santosh Kumar Udgata

College of Fisheries, OUAT, Rangailunda, Berhampur-07

Corresponding Author
Md Shadab Alam
Email: shadab4u98@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Pre-stocking management plays a crucial role in the success of aquaculture and fisheries by ensuring the proper health, growth, and survival of aquatic species. This process involves several important elements such as pond preparation, managing water quality, and implementing biosecurity protocols. These measures are essential in minimizing risks associated with disease outbreaks, stunted growth, and low survival rates of stocked species. Properly preparing the environment before stocking can significantly enhance the well-being of the aquatic organisms and improve the overall productivity of the system. By focusing on best practices during pre-stocking, aquaculture operations can achieve higher yields, ensure better quality products, and contribute to the long-term sustainability and resilience of aquatic farming systems. Such proactive management not only benefits the immediate output but also helps maintain the ecological balance, reduce environmental impacts, and enhance the economic viability of fisheries and aquaculture industries in the long run.

INTRODUCTION

Aquaculture plays a vital role in meeting the growing global protein demand, offering a sustainable and reliable food source. With wild fish populations declining due to overfishing and environmental challenges, aquaculture ensures a steady supply of quality food. Effective management, particularly pre-stocking practices, is key to its success. Pre-stocking involves a range of preparatory task aimed at creating the ideal environment for the species to be stocked. These tasks typically involve preparing the ponds or tanks, ensuring the water quality meets the required standards, and establishing strong biosecurity protocols to prevent diseases and pests. When executed properly, pre-stocking management significantly reduces the risks of disease outbreaks, poor growth, and low survival rates among the stocked species. By effectively carrying out these preparatory steps, aquaculture operations can see notable improvements in the health and growth of the species. Creating optimal environmental conditions, maintaining stable water parameters, and instituting preventive measures lead to better survival rates, faster growth, and greater resilience against environmental challenges. Furthermore, it boosts overall productivity, resulting in more sustainable and efficient aquaculture systems that are capable of delivering higher yields while minimizing negative ecological impacts.

Importance of Pre-Stocking Management:

The pre-stocking phase establishes the initial conditions of the culture environment, which directly influence the performance of the cultured species. Effective management during this phase helps alleviate stress on the stock and reduces the risk of economic losses. Failing to follow these crucial steps can result in significant issues, such as:

- Disease outbreaks caused by unsanitary environments.
- Poor water quality leading to subpar growth.
- Losses from predators.

1. Key Components of Pre-Stocking Management:

- **Pond Preparation:** Pond preparation is the initial phase of pre-stocking management, consisting of several key activities:
- **Drying and Desilting:** Draining the pond and removing accumulated sediments helps to eliminate harmful pathogens and organic waste, improving water quality.
- **Liming:** Applying lime to the pond bottom neutralizes acidic conditions and enhances nutrient availability. The recommended dosage is 200-500 kg/ha, depending on the soil pH (Pillay and Kutty, 2005).
- **Fertilization:** Both organic and inorganic fertilizers are applied to stimulate the growth of natural feed organisms like phytoplankton and zooplankton (Kumar & Khan, 2019).
- **Organic Fertilizers:** Cow dung at 1000-2000 kg/ha.
- **Inorganic Fertilizers:** Urea at 40-60 kg/ha and superphosphate at 20-30 kg/ha.
- **Predator Control:** Inspecting the pond for predators and removing them either manually or with chemical treatments.
- **Structural Integrity:** Ensuring the pond is secure by repairing any leaks or breaches.

2. Water Quality Management

Maintaining optimal water quality is essential for the health and growth of stocked species.

Key parameters to monitor include:

- **pH Levels:** The ideal pH range for most species is between 6.5 and 8.5 (FAO, 2021).

- **Dissolved Oxygen (DO):** Maintaining adequate oxygen levels (>5 ppm) is vital for preventing stress and mortality.
- **Temperature:** While optimal temperatures vary by species, they typically range between 24°C and 30°C (Boyd, 1995).
- **Ammonia and Nitrite Levels**: Elevated levels of ammonia (>0.02 ppm) and nitrite (>0.1 ppm) can be toxic, and should be minimized.
- Regular monitoring with portable water testing kits or laboratory analysis ensures a stable and favourable environment for the stock.

3. Water Treatment Chemicals

To manage water quality, specific chemicals may be used to address various parameters. Regular use of these chemicals ensures that water quality remains within optimal ranges, fostering a healthy environment for the stocked species.

- **Chlorine:** It is used for disinfection and pathogen control, with a typical dosage of 1-3 ppm to ensure water is safe before stocking.
- **Potassium Permanganate:** Potassium permanganate is used to oxidize harmful organic matter, bacteria, and parasites, with a dosage of 1-2 ppm for routine disinfection or 3-5 ppm in severe conditions.
- **Copper Sulphate:** It is primarily applied to control algae blooms and treat external parasites, requiring a dosage of 0.5-2.0 mg/L based on the severity of the issue.
- **Hydrated Lime (Ca (OH)2:** It is utilized to regulate pH levels by neutralizing acidity and enhancing biological activity, with a dosage of 100-500 kg/ha depending on soil pH and water conditions.
- **Zeolite:** A natural mineral, is effective for improving water quality by absorbing ammonia, industry practices suggest dosages ranging from 180 to 350 kg per hectare (approximately 72 to 140 kg per acre) to reduce total ammonia nitrogen (TAN) concentrations in ponds (European Union Digital Library, 2019).
- **Bentonite clay:** used to enhance water clarity by removing suspended solids, typically applied at 500-1000 kg/ha depending on water turbidity. Regular and appropriate use of these chemicals ensures optimal water quality, fostering a healthy environment for aquaculture species (Lonestar Barite, n.d.)
- **Biosecurity Measures**: Biosecurity protocols are essential to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases within aquaculture systems.

Key measures include:

1. **Screening of Stock:** Ensuring that only healthy, disease-free seeds or fingerlings are introduced into the culture system (Pillay & Kutty, 2005).
2. **Disinfection:** Using approved disinfectants to treat water and equipment, thereby eliminating harmful pathogens (FAO, 2021).
3. **Quarantine:** Isolating new stock for observation prior to introducing them into the main culture environment.
4. **Waste Management:** Ensuring the proper disposal of organic waste to prevent the accumulation of harmful pathogens.

Emerging Technologies in Fish Farming:

A. Remote Sensing and Drones for Pond Monitoring.

Drones equipped with specialized sensors like thermal, multispectral, and hyperspectral cameras are increasingly used to monitor water quality in aquaculture ponds. Thermal cameras measure the surface temperature of the water by detecting infrared radiation. Multispectral and hyperspectral cameras analyse the way light reflects off the water to gather information about key parameters such as total suspended solids (TSS) and chromophoric dissolved organic matter (CDOM). The drones are programmed to fly over specific areas of the pond, collecting data as they go. CDOM levels are determined by analysing how the water absorbs ultraviolet and blue light, while TSS levels are calculated based on the way light reflects at particular wavelengths. Drones equipped with advanced sensors are increasingly used to monitor large aquaculture ponds, gathering valuable data on water quality, temperature, and the presence of algae blooms. These aerial surveys allow for the efficient assessment of pond conditions, eliminating the need for manual inspection and significantly reducing time and resource consumption.

B. Real-Time Water Quality Monitoring with IoT Sensors.

By deploying IoT sensors in aquaculture ponds, farm managers gain a robust tool for continuously monitoring essential water quality factors such as pH, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and ammonia levels. These sensors relay data to a cloud-based platform, providing real-time updates on the pond's environmental status. This technology enables quick identification of any fluctuations in water quality, allowing for prompt responses to protect the health of the aquatic species. IoT systems are equipped with automated alert features that notify farm operators when specific water quality thresholds are exceeded. This ensures that corrective actions are taken quickly, reducing the risk of harm or mortality in the stocked species. Moreover, continuous data monitoring aids in strategic decision-making, as managers can assess long-term trends and adjust their management approaches accordingly. The use of IoT in aquaculture enhances operational efficiency, reduces the need for manual labour, and promotes more sustainable farming practices.

C. Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Disease Prediction and Management.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms are essential tools for analysing data from water quality sensors, farm management systems, and historical data to forecast potential disease outbreaks in aquaculture. These AI-powered systems can identify patterns that suggest the early onset of diseases, enabling early intervention before the situation escalates. By recognizing these early indicators, farm managers can take preventive measures to protect the health of the stock. Furthermore, AI can optimize stocking density by evaluating various environmental conditions and historical farm data. This ensures that the stocking levels are suitable for the pond's current conditions, preventing overcrowding and minimizing stress, both of which can contribute to disease outbreaks. In summary, AI in aquaculture enhances farm management by improving disease prediction, refining stocking strategies, and fostering better health and productivity within aquaculture operations.

D. Genomic Tools for Stock Screening and Selection.

Genomic tools and molecular diagnostics are becoming increasingly essential in aquaculture for screening and selecting stock before introducing them into farming systems. These innovative techniques enable farm managers to evaluate genetic traits related to disease resistance, growth potential, and other desirable qualities in the seed stock. By identifying individuals with favourable genetic characteristics, farmers can reduce the risk of disease outbreaks and enhance farm productivity. For instance, genomic selection can help pinpoint fish or other species that naturally resist certain diseases, thus reducing the need for chemical treatments or antibiotics. Additionally, selecting stock with superior growth capabilities leads to more efficient production, resulting in higher yields and better profitability. These genomic advancements support more targeted breeding and stock management, ensuring healthier and stronger species within aquaculture operations. Overall, the use of genomic tools enhances the sustainability and efficiency of aquaculture by enabling more informed decisions in stock selection, ultimately leading to better disease management and optimized productivity.

E. Automated Fertilization Systems.

Automated fertilization systems utilize sensors to monitor pond conditions in real-time and determine the optimal timing and amount of fertilizer to apply, based on factors such as water nutrient levels. By continuously assessing the pond's environment, these systems improve the precision and efficiency of fertilization, ensuring that nutrients are supplied when needed most. This process promotes the growth of natural feed organisms, such as phytoplankton and zooplankton, which in turn supports the survival and growth of the stocked species. The key benefit of automated systems is their ability to apply fertilizers in precise amounts, reducing waste and excess nutrient build-up, which can lead to environmental issues. These systems help maintain balanced pond ecosystems and enhance overall productivity. By optimizing the fertilization process, aquaculture operations can improve feed availability for the aquatic species, resulting in healthier and more robust stock (Liu et al., 2022).

F. Biosecurity Robotics.

Robots can disinfect ponds and equipment, reducing the risk of human error and contamination. These systems perform regular disinfection routines using environmentally friendly chemicals, minimizing human contact with water and equipment and reducing the introduction of pathogens.

Best Practices and Recommendations.

To ensure the success of pre-stocking management, follow these key steps:

- **Plan Ahead and Regular Training:** Planning ahead by creating a clear management plan helps meet the specific needs of the species being cultured, while regular training of farm staff ensures they are equipped with the best methods for preparing ponds and managing water quality effectively.
- **Seek Expert Guidance:** Working with aquaculture experts to get advice that fits the unique needs of the farm.
- **Documentation:** Keeping detailed records of all pre-stocking activities, including water quality measurements, treatments used, and stocking numbers.

Fig1. Application of Lime in Aquaculture Ponds

Fig 2. Removal of Aquatic Weeds, Netting, and Filling Clean Water in Ponds.

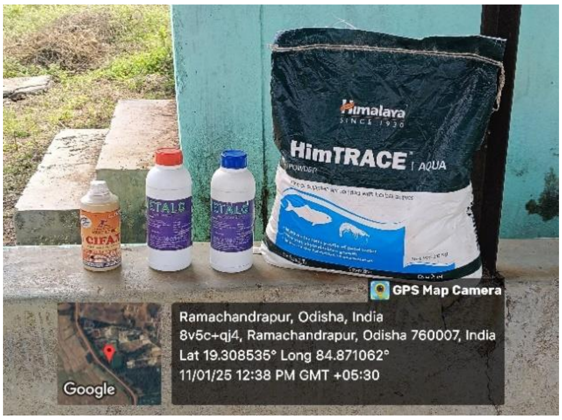

Fig 3. Chemicals Used for Water Treatment in Aquaculture.

CONCLUSION

Pre-stocking management is indispensable for achieving sustainable aquaculture production. Effective pre-stocking management is crucial for the success of aquaculture operations, ensuring optimal water quality, fish health, and overall productivity. By integrating advanced technologies such as automated water quality monitoring systems, real-time data analytics, and precision aquaculture tools, farmers can make informed decisions that enhance stock performance and reduce risks. These innovations enable more efficient management of resources, improved disease prevention, and better environmental sustainability. Embracing such technological advancements in pre-stocking management will contribute significantly to the long-term success and sustainability of aquaculture practices, addressing both economic and environmental challenges in the industry.

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