


AT THE FOREFRONT: Andreas

Kamstra, director of the Solea farm, has spoken to retailers but has not yet signed any deals for the company's sole. "This amount of fish would be very easy to sell, I think," Kamstra said.

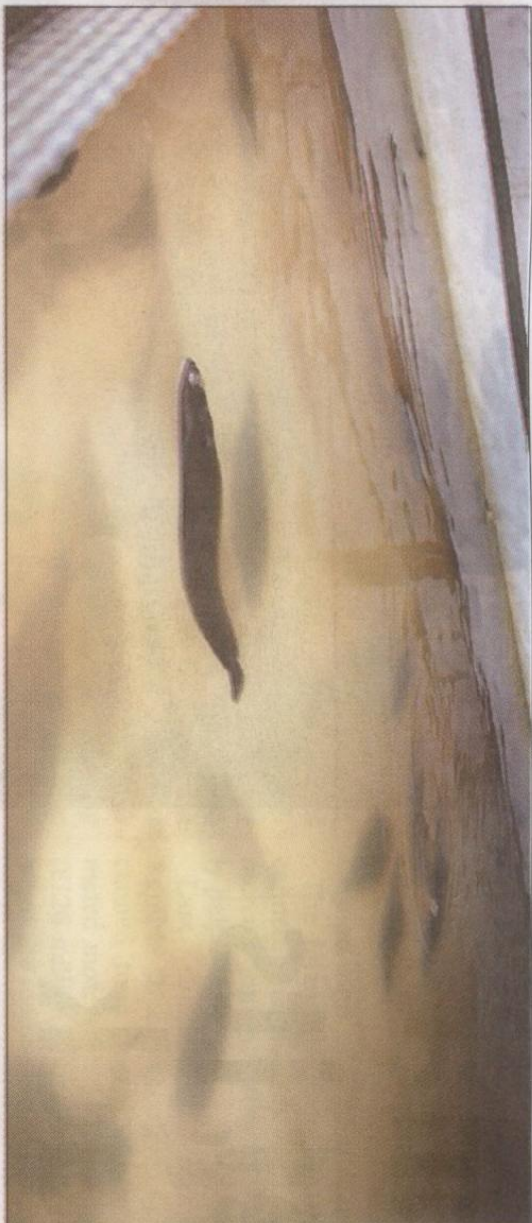
not remove dissolved organics that may taint fish flesh, leaving a muddy taste.

Bitten by the bug

Andreas Kamstra director of the Solea farm in IJmuiden, Netherlands, understands all too well the complexities of scaling up production.

After five years, Kamstra said the project, which began in a greenhouse, will finally start producing sole this summer, targeting 100 tons volume within two years.

Having no experience with such a large system, Kamstra said he had to figure out how to set up grading, logistics, water treatment, feeding, and feed


IT'S A START: The Solea farm in Netherlands will start producing sole this summer, targeting 100 tons within two years.

waste monitoring systems.

Although he has spoken to retailers, Kamstra said no deals are yet signed. "This amount of fish would be very easy to sell I think," he said.

Among those backing the project, which Kamstra put at a "few million euros," are two Dutch fish auctions and a large pelagic fishing company.

Another Dutchman to have been bitten by the land-based aquaculture bug is Harrie Rutgers, who forecast farmed barramundi production in Europe could reach 600 metric tons the next five years. Rutgers' RBC Co. has joined forces with the Australian Cell Aquaculture to produce the

tropical fish at a new site in Tolbert, Netherlands.

While the initial scope of the investment is around €1 million (\$1.2 million), Rutgers, who is planning to build a network of European "farm-to-doorstep" partnerships and franchises, said the figure could rise.



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Andreas Kamstra, director of the Solea farm.

At this point there are always surprises," said Rutgers, Cell Aquaculture's general manager in Europe.

He expects production to be up and running in March.

Dixie fish

Cell Aquaculture initially will ship two-week-old fingerlings from its base at Freemantle in western Australia.

Cell announced last month it will roll out its barramundi system in the United States by buying a "substantial stake" in Nevada-based Delta Aquaculture Services and shipping fingerlings from Queensland, Australia. Delta recently acquired the Dixie Fish Farms hatchery, which is producing red drum in Mississippi.

Barramundi competition

Cell Aquaculture executives are not the only Aussies backing a hunch on the saleability of barramundi in the United States. After an August 2004 initial public offering (IPO) in Australia, barramundi farmer Australis Inc. sold its first fish last March, in time for the Boston seafood show.

Australis has plowed AUD 10 million (€6.1 million/\$7.5 million) into its Turners' Falls, Mass., site, where it is expanding toward 1,000 tons, according to CEO Josh Goldman.

Goldman said his company is positioning "Australia's unofficial national fish" as an authentic Australian culinary experience in the white-tablecloth sector.

The plan is to cash in on America's historical acceptance of Australian products, while avoiding freight costs.

Driving the project is the need to be positioned close to major markets, while meeting the highest sustainability criteria, Goldman said, adding the acquisition of a species and a move into existing premises has fast-tracked development.

Australis is embarking on an active marketing and advertising campaign using a number of high-profile chefs such as Rick Moonen, dubbed the "prince of seafood" by some media outlets.

As Australis prepares to move into retail and multi-unit restaurant chains, Goldman said the company has achieved continuous coverage in the culinary trade press, paying for print ads with television coverage to come.

Acknowledging the business is not all plain sailing, Goldman said competition from Asia is more likely to come in the frozen sector. "No one is immune," Goldman said. "We all live in a global environment, but our strategy is to do a good enough job on the quality and the freshness."