



1. Les and Milada hand sort the harvested worms and place them in a bed of clean sand over which a stream of water continually flows.

2. Concrete tanks with a deep sediment are used to hold large populations of worms.

Below: Due to increased demand for worms, AquaBait are now selling 1 kg frozen packs.

Farmed tube worms by the millions!

Who could imagine that wriggly polychaete worms could create such interest? A unique marine worm farm on the central coast of NSW is expanding to fill the burgeoning world wide demand from recreational fishers, hatchery operators and pellet feed manufacturers. As the first marine worm farm in the southern hemisphere, its success is generating a lot of interest both here and overseas.

The innovative AquaBait marine worm farm was first featured in the April-May 2004 (Vol 18 No 2) edition of *Austasia Aquaculture*. Back then the main market for the worms was as live bait for recreational fishermen. Since then R&D has identified the significant nutritional benefits of marine worms and this has led the development of new and lucrative markets for these curious creatures, both here in Australia and overseas.

The key to the new interest is a type of polyunsaturated fatty acid called bromophenol (see box insert p8) which have been found to significantly improve the nutritional quality and overall taste of cultured seafood. Marine polychaete worms have been found to be a high quality source of these bromophenols. With natural supplies of these worms becoming overfished or destroyed by habitat degradation, the search is on for more and more farmed worms.

According to Ladislav (Les) Safank,

AquaBait worms have been reported to have high levels of bromophenols (1.16mg/gm – Whitfield et al 1999). "In addition, due to beneficial HUFAs and PUFAs, marine worms form an interesting appetiser in larval weaning and broodstock propagation diets," he says.

Tony Charles, hatchery manager at Mackay-based Australian Prawn Farms swears by them. "We have been feeding frozen AquaBait worms to our broodstock for more than three years. Along with squid and mussels we feed the worms as a certain percentage of the prawn diet. The AquaBait product is both clean and nutritious. They are a fantastic and irreplaceable part of the special balanced diet for our prawns."

Family operation

The amazing part of this story is that this world's best technology has been developed not by a big team of scientists but by a Sydney-based family. Les and his family

emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1982 and settled in Sydney. A committed recreational fisherman, he often bemoaned the fact he couldn't get decent worms from the

