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Date: March 23, 2007

Innovative Program Revolutionizes Private Pond Forage Fish Purchasing

“Why buy thousands when you can get millions for a fraction of the cost?”

Lonoke, Arkansas—I.F. Anderson and W.L. Anderson are celebrated today as bona fide pioneers of the fish farming industry in the United States. It's only natural, then, that fourth-generation farmer Jamie Anderson is perpetuating the trend.

Through an innovative and highly effective forage fish fry shipping program, Anderson, his father, Neal, and the experienced crew at Lonoke, Arkansas-based I.F. Anderson Farms will begin shipping millions of golden shiner fish fry to private pond owners and managers during the first week of April.

Founded in 1949, I.F. Anderson Farms is the nation's largest producer of golden shiners. However, the advent of the farm's golden shiner forage fish fry program represents a new era in the family-owned company's extensive history.

“A lot of people buy adult forage fish,” Anderson says. “What we are now doing through our hatchery is selling two- and three-day-old fry at a much larger quantity head-wise but at a much, much cheaper price. Matter of fact, when you do the numbers it's a virtual no-brainer.

“Most of our forage fish sell as ‘size 12’ shiners,” Anderson explains. “It's called a ‘size 12’ because a thousand of these fish will weigh around 12 pounds. What you're looking at is approximately 80 fish per pound. Most of those are currently delivered for around \$6.50 per pound, or 12 fish per dollar on the average,” he continues. “With fry coming straight out of our hatchery, you can buy a thousand fish for a dollar. In other words, *a box of 250,000 fish sells for only \$250.00.*”

Survival rates for the stocked fry are remarkably high. Furthermore, stocking with fry helps the pond manager achieve several primary goals.

“The price is a real attention-getter,” Anderson comments. “The economics are impossible to beat. However,” he adds, “there are other important benefits to stocking golden shiners purchased from our hatchery.

“The fry are still feeding on their yolk sacs when they come out of the hatchery,” Anderson explains. “When you release them into a pond they begin feeding on the zooplankton and whatever is available inside that body of water. The fish are super-hardy, and soon as they begin to feed on zooplankton they take off and begin to grow like crazy.

“In a lot of fish ponds, the gamefish are stacked in heavy because people want to be able to catch them easily,” he notes. “Sometimes, the only thing the bass and crappie in a pond end up being able to feed upon is their own fry. Once they spawn in spring, they begin to eat their own 1- and 2-inch fingerlings as food just because there is no other forage. That,” Anderson emphasizes, “is where the golden shiner fry come in. With our program, not only will your small bass and crappie feed off of the small shiners and their fry; the fry that do not get eaten will eventually grow out and become excellent forage for the gamefish. And they grow super-fast,” Anderson says. “Within a month, you will have inch-and-a-half-long shiners in your pond that can be eaten by the larger fish.

“However,” he adds, “even the smallest fish in a pond need something to eat. For gamefish like bass, crappie, bream and other species that are already there, whatever the sizes of the gamefish, stocked golden shiner fry complete the cycle. Stocking fry like these makes a remarkable difference in the overall size and health of your gamefish.”

According to Anderson, in any pond that holds a significant gamefish population, stockings of fry will eventually need to be replenished. “Logistics wise, it’s best to place around 250,000 head in one box,” he advises. “That’s our minimum order. Of course, you can buy as many boxes as you like. We recommend 250,000 per acre.”

The golden shiner fry are brought into the I.F. Anderson farms hatchery facility as eggs harvested from outside ponds. “Once they are hatched out, we separate them and count them,” Anderson explains. “We bag them up in heavy cardboard boxes with insulated liners, place them in the bags and then add oxygen and a little bit of tranquilizer. From there,” he adds, “they go straight to Federal Express and directly to the customer.”

Along with shipments of baitfish produced by the farm, including mature shiners, goldfish and the popular all-purpose Black Salty baitfish, Federal Express overnight deliveries of I.F. Anderson Farms golden shiner fry arrive at the customer’s doorstep (within the Continental United States) on Tuesdays and Fridays.

“Because our hatchery is only open during the months of April and May, the fry are, likewise, available during April and May only,” Anderson explains. “However, customers can pre-order now and we will ship the fish as soon as they become available.”

“It’s really important to note as well that we are one of the very few fish farms that are inspected by international standards,” Anderson stresses. “Our fish are guaranteed to be free of regulated diseases and parasites. That makes a big difference in peace of mind when you spend a lot of money on your bass and crappie. You don’t want to put anything in there that will harm them,” Anderson says, “and again, we guarantee that our products will not.”

For more information on I.F. Anderson Farms, the April/May golden shiner fish fry stocking program and the farm’s complete lineup of baitfish and forage species, check the Web a www.andersonminnows.com or call I.F. Anderson Farms, toll-free, at 1-800-206-4666 (20-MINNO).