



Aquaculture at a Glance

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Florida's aquaculture industry is a dynamic and diverse sector that plays a key role in the state's economy and environmental management. With over 1,000 certified aquaculture farms throughout the state, Florida produces a wide variety of over 1,500 aquatic species.

Aquaculture is the raising of aquatic organisms. The industry benefits from Florida's climate, abundant water sources and proximity to both domestic and international markets, making Florida the leader in several specialty aquaculture products, namely ornamental fish and aquatic plants.

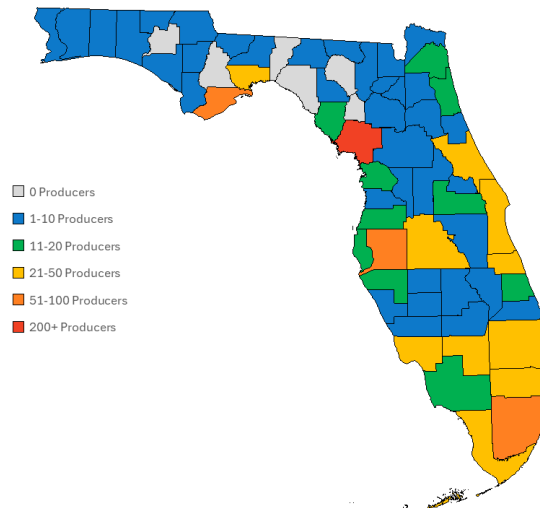
Aquaculture involves extensive systems that require minimal human input, and intensive systems that involve high levels of management and controlled environments to maximize production and efficiency.

These methods are used to cultivate a wide breadth of species, including ornamental fish, molluscs such as clams and oysters, freshwater and marine food fish, aquatic plants and aquatic reptiles or amphibians such as alligators and bullfrogs.

Certified aquaculture farms can be upland or submerged land leases. An upland aquaculture farm is typically

located at higher elevations or inland areas. These farms often rely on artificial ponds, tanks, or raceways and use pumped or recirculated water systems to raise aquatic species. Upland systems allow for greater control over water quality and biosecurity, making them suitable for intensive aquaculture operations.

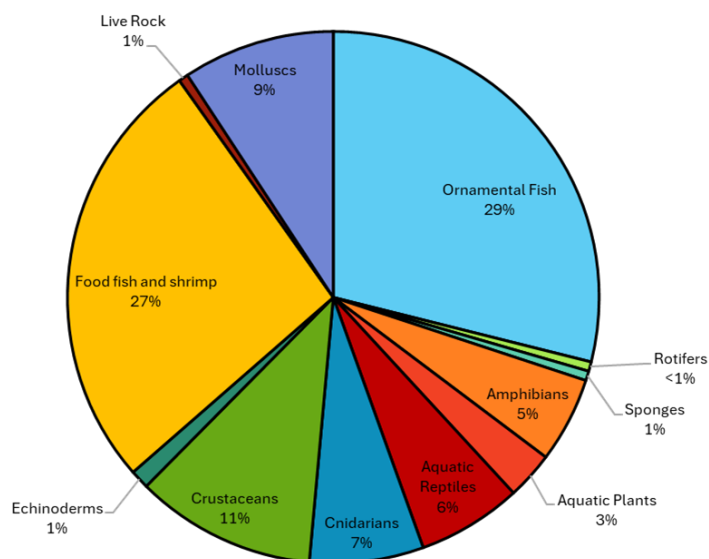
Total Aquaculture Certificate Holders per County 2025



A submerged land lease in Florida is a legal agreement that allows the use of state-owned submerged land and state-controlled waters for aquaculture activities like shellfish farming. These leases grant the right to cultivate and harvest aquatic species, from oysters and clams, to live rock on designated parcels of sovereignty submerged land. These leases are typically located in coastal and estuarine areas where conditions support healthy shellfish growth. To obtain a lease, applicants must go through a review process to ensure that the proposed activity will not harm sensitive habitats or interfere with public navigation and recreation.

Aquaculture has been practiced for at least three thousand years, beginning with small carp ponds in China. Production methods remained small-scale until the population boom after World War II. By the 1950s, technological advancements and concerns over declining wild fish stocks spurred rapid development of aquaculture as a key contributor to global food security.

Florida Aquaculture Species in Production 2025



The aquaculture industry is now the fastest growing production system worldwide. In the 1880s, the first oyster cultch were planted in the Gulf. From there we have seen stock enhancement of alligators and ornamental fish aquaculture emerging in Florida for tourism and conservation during the early 1900s. Next, Florida began to see a major boom in large-scale production farms during the 1980s-1990s. Due to this sudden increase of aquaculture in Florida both the Aquaculture Policy Act was passed and the Aquaculture Review Council was created in 1984. In 1996 “Aquaculture is Agriculture” is legislatively designated along with the creation of the Aquaculture Certificate of Registration Program. The Florida aquaculture industry’s farmgate value passes \$100 million for the first time in 1997. Finally in 1998 The Division of Aquaculture is established within the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Census of Aquaculture has tracked farm-gate values since 2005. This voluntarily reported data showcases a farm gate value of 165.9 million dollars of revenue generated by the Florida aquaculture industry in 2023. Florida leads the nation in the production of ornamental fish and aquatic plants. It also ranks second in alligator farming and third in shellfish production, making Florida one of the most diverse and productive aquaculture states in the United States.

In addition to economic value, Florida aquaculture supports conservation and restoration efforts. Many farms collaborate with state and federal agencies to produce native plants and animals for wetland restoration, oyster reef building and stock enhancement programs. Aquaculture plays a vital role in promoting environmental sustainability by reducing pressure on wild fish populations and supporting healthier marine ecosystems. As this pressure on wild fisheries increases and environmental concerns grow, responsible fish farming offers a reliable and controlled way to meet global demand. By cultivating species like oysters, clams and other bivalves, aquaculture also provides natural water filtration, improving water quality and promoting biodiversity in coastal areas.

Ornamental Fish



Aquatic Plants



Alligators



Shellfish

