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'Shark-proof' aquaculture pen makes debut

Lesley Rogers



After frustrations in the Maine salmon farming industry, Steve Page spent two years creating a galvanized steel wire structure aimed at growing the offshore aquaculture industry.

Last month, his Maine-based company, Ocean Farm Technologies Inc., installed a new "AquaPod" steel-and-wire mesh net pen for Snapperfarm Inc. to raise cobia in deep water off Culebra, Puerto Rico, Page told IntraFish.

Snapperfarm owner Brian O'Hanlon says he's been pleased with the product, which he uses to raise juvenile cobia. "We expect the rigid framing will make it easier to install feed systems and to harvest efficiently," he said.

The AquaPod's patent is pending, Page said. The structure is completely submersible and normally is kept at least six meters below the surface.

Page, former manager of Atlantic Salmon of Maine, said he invented the pen after seeing problems in the salmon aquaculture industry -- attacks by ocean predators, fish escaping from pens, disease, and problems with waterfront landowners.

"I saw a need for a new containment system that's easy and safe to operate," Page said.

The pen is suitable for strong offshore currents, helping to move aquaculture to deeper waters, he said. Construction makes it immune to shark attacks.

In the past six months, Page said he's seen a lot of venture capital in offshore aquaculture.

"The inevitable worldwide expansion of fish aquaculture will occur offshore, in deep water," Page said. "This requires containment systems that will be affordable and also suitable to offshore conditions."

The AquaPod comes in three sizes -- 3,250 cubic meters; 6,400 cubic meters and 10,000 cubic meters, and sells for between \$20 (€15.60) and \$30 (€23.40) per cubic meter.

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