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Utilization of Locally Available Resources for the Development of Low Cost Aquafeeds

Dipangka Saikia
Krishi Vigyan Kendra Kokrajhar, Telipara, Gossaigaon, Assam-783360
Email: dipangka.saikia@aau.ac.in

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Abstract

Aquaculture contributes significantly to global food production and livelihood generation particularly in countries where fish is a major source of animal protein. However, feed cost accounts for the highest operational expenditure in aquaculture and dependency on scarce and expensive conventional ingredients like fishmeal and soybean meal affects economic viability. The identification and utilization of locally available low-cost feed resources provide opportunities to minimize production costs and ensure sustainability. Different categories of locally sourced materials including cereal by products oilseed cakes aquatic plants insects market wastes and agro industrial residues possess considerable nutritional value for aquafeed development. Techniques such as drying grinding heat treatment pelleting and fermentation improve nutrient availability and digestibility of unconventional ingredients. The integration of these resources strengthens local feed production resource recycling and employment generation while reducing ecological pressure on marine ecosystems. Continuous evaluation of nutrient composition feed formulation and processing methods strengthens the feasibility of low-cost feed adoption by farmers.

Key words: Aquaculture, Feed cost, Low-cost feeds, Local ingredients, Fish nutrition, Sustainability

Introduction

Aquaculture has grown rapidly during recent decades and contributes more than half of the fish consumed globally (FAO 2022). Expansion of this sector is associated with increasing demand for nutritionally balanced fish feeds that support optimum growth and health. Feed alone accounts for sixty to seventy percent of the total recurring cost in intensive and semi-intensive aquaculture systems (Hardy, 2010). Fishmeal and soybean meal remain dominant protein sources but high prices supply fluctuations and competition with livestock and human consumption limit their affordability and availability (Tacon and Metian, 2015).

Small scale farmers in developing regions often struggle to purchase commercial feeds leading to reduced production efficiency. Alternatively, a wide diversity of agricultural household and natural resources can supply nutrients essential for fish growth. These locally available materials reduce feed expenses improve waste recycling and promote self-sufficiency at farm level. Adoption of such resources depends on their accessibility nutrient quality processing possibilities and acceptance by target species.

Development of low cost aquafeeds increasingly aligns with sustainable production goals including circular economy principles and conservation of marine feedstocks.

Importance of Locally Available Feed Resources

Locally available feed ingredients play crucial roles in enhancing profitability by lowering feed expenses and reducing dependence on imported materials. They also support rural entrepreneurship through establishment of small-scale feed processing units. The use of indigenous resources enhances food system resilience and aligns aquaculture growth with environmental protection goals through reduced waste accumulation and carbon footprint (Hasan and New, 2013).

Nutritional Considerations in Low-Cost Feed Development

Fish require proteins carbohydrates lipids vitamins and minerals. Protein is the costliest component contributing significantly to feed

budgets. Most cultured finfish require diets containing twenty-five to forty five percent protein depending on feeding habits and life stage (NRC, 2011). Locally available feed ingredients must ensure balanced amino acid composition especially lysine and methionine which are critical for growth.

Carbohydrates supply energy but digestibility varies between herbivorous omnivorous and carnivorous fish species. Lipids provide essential fatty acids particularly omega 3 and omega 6 families. Vitamins and minerals support physiological functions immunity and skeletal development.

To meet these requirements combinations of ingredients often perform better than single ingredient inclusion. Evaluation through proximate analysis digestibility studies and feeding trials ensures suitable incorporation levels.

Categories of Locally Available Feed Ingredients

Cereal By Products

Cereal milling generates substantial by products including rice bran wheat bran maize bran and broken rice. These ingredients primarily act as energy sources with moderate protein content. Rice bran contains twelve to fourteen percent protein and valuable oils but high fiber content restricts its use in carnivorous species. Proper sieving and stabilization reduce rancidity issues.

Wheat bran is widely used due to good palatability and carbohydrate content. Maize bran provides energy and is preferred for pellet stability.

Oilseed Cakes and Meals

Oil extraction industries offer meals and cakes rich in plant protein

- Mustard oil cake contains around thirty-five to forty percent crude protein though heat treatment reduces glucosinolates and improves suitability
- Groundnut cake provides good amino acid profile and lipid content
- Linseed cake and sesame cake supply minerals and digestible proteins

Oilseed cakes help replace fishmeal partially with positive impacts on feed affordability.

Aquatic Macrophytes and Leafy Materials

Aquatic plants grow rapidly in nutrient rich environments and enhance resource recycling.

- Duckweed Lemna minor may contain up to thirty five percent protein on dry matter basis and its cultivation is simple and inexpensive (Leng *et al*., 1995).
- Azolla Azolla pinnata possesses nitrogen fixing symbionts enhancing protein and mineral accumulation
- Water spinach provides vitamins and improves pellet texture

Drying and grinding increase inclusion feasibility. Herbivorous and omnivorous fish such as tilapia and common carp readily utilize them.

Animal Based by Products

Processing and slaughter sectors generate protein rich residues including poultry offal meal blood meal and meat bone meal.

- Blood meal has high lysine but low methionine hence works best in combination with plant proteins
- Poultry by product meal effectively substitutes fishmeal in feeds for catfish and tilapia without compromising growth performance.

Quality control prevents microbial contamination ensuring safe utilization.

Insects and Larvae

Insects such as black soldier fly Hermetia illucens larvae housefly maggots and silkworm pupae provide sustainable animal proteins. Their lifecycle depends on organic waste substrates generating two benefits

- Nutrient rich biomass
- Waste reduction

Studies indicate black soldier fly meal can replace up to fifty percent of fishmeal in tilapia feeds (Makkar *et al.*, 2014). Insect meals also show promising digestibility and amino acid composition.

Agro Industrial Residues

Brewery spent grains molasses sugarcane bagasse cassava peel and fruit wastes act as inexpensive energy sources. Proper drying grinding or fermentation improves their nutrient utilization. Brewery spent grain supports partial replacement of cereal ingredients for African catfish diets.

Household and Market Wastes

Kitchen residues vegetable scraps spoiled fruits fish market wastes and leftovers offer economical feed resources if processed correctly. Sun drying and grinding ensure safer incorporation. Adoption contributes to waste recycling and reduces environmental burden especially in peri urban aquaculture zones.

Processing Approaches for Enhanced Utilization

Processing determines safety palatability nutrient release and feed stability. Widely applied procedures include

• Drying and Grinding enhance shelf life reduce water content and improve mixing
• Heat Treatment reduces antinutrients and improves protein denaturation especially in oilseed cakes
• Fermentation degrades fiber and toxic substances improving digestibility and probiotic effects.
• Pelleting or Extrusion ensures water stability reduces feed loss and enables precise rationing

Ensuring quality control and storage hygiene prevents microbial spoilage.

Formulation Strategies and Feed Evaluation

Formulating a balanced diet requires nutrient profiling of available ingredients. Least cost formulation techniques using linear programming match nutritional requirements with minimum expenses (Hardy, 2010). Inclusion levels depend on palatability and species-specific digestive capabilities.

Once formulated feeds undergo evaluation in growth trials to measure daily weight gain feed conversion ratio and survival percentage. Water quality maintenance during experimentation affects feed utilization efficiency.

Species such as rohu *Labeo rohita* grass carp *Ctenopharyngodon idella* and Nile tilapia *Oreochromis niloticus* are widely used in performance assessment due to their diverse dietary preferences.

Economic and Ecological Benefits

Adoption of locally available feed resources offers several advantages

• Feed cost reduction improves income and profitability for farmers
• Reduced dependence on imported fishmeal promotes national food system security
• Recycling of agricultural and household waste supports cleaner environments
• Local feed milling stimulates job opportunities and rural enterprise development
• Pressure on capture fisheries declines conserving marine biodiversity (Naylor *et al*., 2021)

Such benefits enhance long term sustainability of aquaculture value chains.

Challenges and Limitations

Constraints affecting wider utilization of unconventional feed resources involve

• Nutrient variability across seasons and geographical regions
• Presence of antinutritional compounds in some plant materials
• Limited awareness and technical capacity among smallholder farmers
• Weak supply chains and absence of feed quality standards

Continued research on ingredient improvement enzyme supplementation and feed processing technologies can overcome these limitations. Institutional support strengthens technical outreach and knowledge transfer to farmers.

Future Prospects

The future of feed development emphasizes sustainability innovation and local empowerment. Insects single cell proteins algae and fermented extracts show growing relevance. Establishment of regional feed ingredient databases and laboratory facilities for nutrient analysis enhances formulation accuracy.

Government led capacity building and credit support enable adoption of small-scale feed production units which help farmers to reduce expenditure and diversify livelihood options.

Combining modern feed processing technologies with traditional low-cost resources aligns aquaculture with environmental stewardship and economic viability goals.

Conclusion

Efficient utilization of locally available feed resources greatly enhances the sustainability of aquaculture production systems especially in regions where feed cost limits productivity. A wide spectrum of agricultural residues aquatic plants insect meals and animal by products can successfully replace expensive feed ingredients when properly processed and formulated. Adoption reduces environmental pollution strengthens rural economies and contributes to food system resilience. Continued scientific evaluation capacity building and policy support encourage widespread use of affordable and nutritionally effective aquafeeds improving profitability and ensuring long term growth of aquaculture.

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