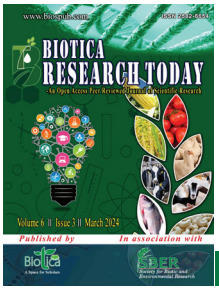
Bio. Res. Today 2024, 6(3):107-109



Biotica Research Today

e-ISSN: 2582-6654

March, 2024

Article ID: RT1588 **Popular Article**

Polychaete Worms: The Anticipated Advantages of Aquaculture's Broodstock Development

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Conflict of interests: The author has declared that no conflict of interest exists.

How to cite this article?

Jackqulinwino and Ahilan, 2024. Polychaete Worms: The Anticipated Advantages of Aquaculture's Broodstock Development. *Biotica Research Today* 6(3), 107-109.

Abstract

Polychaete worms, a diverse group of marine organisms, have garnered increasing attention in recent years for their potential as broodstock in aquaculture systems. Polychaetes offer several unique characteristics that make them promising candidates for this role. Firstly, their reproductive biology is adaptable, with many species exhibiting high fecundity rates and rapid larval development, which could significantly enhance aquaculture production efficiency. Secondly, polychaetes possess a diverse array of nutritional profiles, making them suitable as feed for various aquaculture species, thereby contributing to sustainable feed solutions and reducing reliance on wild-caught sources. Additionally, Polychaetes thrive in a range of environmental conditions and tolerance to fluctuations in water quality positions them as resilient candidates for aquaculture systems, potentially reducing risks associated with disease outbreaks or environmental stressors. In conclusion, the development of polychaete worms as broodstock holds significant promise for the aquaculture industry, offering opportunities to improve production efficiency, sustainability and environmental stewardship.

Keywords: Aquaculture, Broodstock development, Polychaete worms, Sustainability

Introduction

Aquaculture continues to expand rapidly to meet the growing global demand for seafood. However, this growth presents challenges such as the sustainability of feed sources, environmental impacts and disease management. In this context, the exploration of alternative species for aquaculture, such as polychaete worms, has gained traction. Polychaetes offer unique advantages as broodstock, including their reproductive biology, nutritional value, adaptability to various environmental conditions and potential role in bioremediation. Polychaetes, derived from the Greek word "poly" meaning many and "chaetae" meaning bristles, aptly describe these segmented marine worms adorned with numerous bristle-like structures known as chaetae. With over 10,000 described species and likely many more awaiting discoveries, polychaetes inhabit various marine environments, from shallow coastal waters to the abyssal depths.

Polychaetes are a vital source of food for young fish, shrimps and prawns, polychaete worms play a significant role in the marine food chain. Because polychaetes contain more polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), such as arachidonic acid, eicosapentaenoic acid and docosahexaenoic acid, they have been shown to accelerate maturity and enhance fecundity among Penaeid shrimps. Polychaetes are an essential maturation diet for broodstock shrimps. Unscientific commercial exploitation of polychaete worms is taking place and this uncontrolled exploitation of polychaetes is endangering the ecology and eventually the livelihood of the fishermen. The "National Biodiversity Act 2002" prohibits the collecting of wild polychaete worms. Therefore, it is crucial to standardize polychaete worm culture procedures and it is much more pertinent to apply these production procedures to operators of prawn hatcheries. The *Penaeus vannamei* hatcheries undergo a nearly eight-month-long prawn maturation period. Currently, live polychaete worms

Article History

RECEIVED on 12th March 2024 RECEIVED in revised form 22nd March 2024 ACCEPTED in final form 23rd March 2024

weighing an average of 6 kg and 45 kg are utilized in *P. vannamei* and *P. monodon* shrimp hatcheries, respectively, at an expense of Rs. 2000.00 kg^{-1}. Presently, these worms are sourced from the wild and may potentially transfer pathogens to shrimp brooders. Therefore, the scientific production of SPF polychaete worms is the key to pathogen-free quality shrimp seed production. During 2020-21 India imported 2,76,346 numbers of SPF broodstock of Pacific white shrimp, *Penaeus vannamei* and almost 300 MT polychaete worms are used in shrimp hatcheries as a maturation diet. The emergence of Polychaeta in aquaculture is necessary, therefore, encouraging basic studies on the reproductive biology, physiology and genetics of polychaete worms and reap the rewards of subsequent research findings (Santhiya and Chrispin, 2021).

The Promise of Aquaculture's Broodstock Development

Aquaculture, the farming of aquatic organisms, has emerged as a crucial industry to meet the growing demand for seafood while alleviating pressure on wild fish stocks. However, the success of aquaculture relies heavily on the availability of high-quality broodstock - the breeding individuals used to produce offspring for commercial purposes. Herein lies the potential of polychaete worms in aquaculture's broodstock development. Several species of polychaetes exhibit traits that make them ideal candidates for cultivation:

Reproductive Biology and Fecundity of Polychaete Worms

Polychaetes often have short generation times and high fecundity, enabling quick and efficient production of offspring in controlled environments. The Polychaete worms exhibit diverse reproductive strategies, with many species capable of high fecundity rates and rapid larval development. Understanding the reproductive biology of polychaetes is crucial for optimizing breeding protocols and enhancing larval survival rates in aquaculture systems. Additionally, the ability to manipulate reproductive cycles and synchronize spawning events offers opportunities to maximize production efficiency.

Nutritional Profile and Feed Potential of Polychaete Worms

Polychaete worms are commonly called omega worms due to their high content of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) (Lytle *et al*., 1990). Polychaetes are known for their diverse nutritional profiles, making them suitable candidates for aquafeed formulations. Their rich protein and lipid content, as well as essential vitamins and minerals, can contribute to the health and growth of cultured species. Incorporating polychaetes into aquafeeds can reduce reliance on fishmeal and fish oil, thereby promoting sustainability in aquaculture production. Their lipid contents may provide a source of essential polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) especially the n3-C22 and n3-C20 classes of fatty acids which are very essential for the production of high-quality seeds of finfishes and crustaceans (Murugesan *et al.*, 2009).

Adaptability and Resilience of Polychaete Worms

These worms are typically found near shrimp farms, river mouths, mangrove zones and on the edges of forests. Despite their small size, polychaetes play crucial roles in marine ecosystems. They participate in nutrient cycling and sediment stabilization and serve as a vital food source for many marine organisms, including commercially important species. Additionally, their burrowing activities aerate sediments, facilitating the growth of microorganisms essential for healthy ecosystems. Polychaete worms demonstrate adaptability to a wide range of environmental conditions and are tolerant to fluctuations in water quality. This resilience makes them suitable for aquaculture systems facing challenges such as temperature variations, salinity fluctuations and nutrient imbalances. Moreover, their ability to thrive in diverse habitats mitigates risks associated with disease outbreaks and environmental stressors, enhancing the overall robustness of aquaculture operations.

Bioremediation Potential of Polychaete Worms

Polychaetes have the potential to serve as bioremediation in aquaculture systems, aiding in the removal of organic waste and excess nutrients from water bodies. By consuming organic matter and converting it into biomass, polychaetes can help mitigate eutrophication and improve water quality, thus promoting environmental sustainability in aquaculture. Sustainable cultivation of polychaete worms not only ensures a consistent supply of high-quality feed for broodstock but also mitigates the ecological impact of overharvesting from natural habitats.

Challenges and Opportunities of Polychaete Worms as Broodstock

While the potential benefits of utilizing polychaetes in aquaculture are evident, several challenges must be addressed to realize their full potential:

1. Species Selection: Identifying suitable species for aquaculture requires comprehensive research into their biology, reproductive characteristics and nutritional value.

2. Optimization of Culture Conditions: Developing optimal culture conditions, including diet formulation, water quality management and housing systems, is essential for maximizing the growth and reproductive success of polychaetes in captivity.

3. Environmental Impacts: As with any aquaculture practice, potential environmental impacts must be carefully considered to ensure sustainable production practices that minimize negative effects on marine ecosystems.

4. Market Acceptance: Educating consumers about the nutritional benefits and sustainability of polychaete-based products is crucial for creating demand and market acceptance.

Conclusion

The development of polychaete worms as broodstock holds great promise for the aquaculture industry, offering numerous advantages in terms of production efficiency, sustainability and environmental stewardship. Due to its dual status as a fishery, the resource is finite and vulnerable to overuse. Thus, given the growing need for these marine worms in the aquaculture sector, now is the ideal moment to refine the culture technology for producing polychaete

worms in large quantities. Despite the challenges associated with their culture and integration into aquaculture systems, ongoing research and collaboration between scientists, industry stakeholders and policymakers can unlock the full potential of polychaetes in aquaculture. By harnessing their unique attributes and addressing key research priorities, polychaetes can contribute significantly to the future of sustainable aquaculture production.

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