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## **Like a Fish Out of *Salt Water*?**

### **Virginia Cobia Farms Debuts Product at International Boston Seafood Show**

BOSTON, March 20, 2007 — A Virginia company using patented technology to produce a fast-growing, high-yielding marine fish some 300 miles from the nearest ocean made its debut at the International Boston Seafood Show, turning heads and luring hundreds of inquiries from potential buyers.

“We believe that freshwater-raised cobia is the next chicken of the sea — one that will fill growing consumer demand for marine fish high in Omega 3 fatty acids without burdening the ocean’s already depleted fish stocks,” says Bill Martin, chairman [Virginia Cobia Farms](#), LLC, Saltville.

There’s one other plus. Virginia cobia are raised in tanks and its feed components are carefully monitored, so there’s no risk of mercury content — a growing concern in some marine species.

Martin eventually plans to produce up to 200 millions pounds of cobia a year at his southwestern Virginia farm. That may not sound like a lot when compared to the 600 million pounds of catfish produced in the Delta and other southern states. “But 200 million pounds is a heck of a lot of fish coming from one spot,” Martin says.

That “one spot” is Saltville, Virginia, a small town in an economically depressed area of the state that stands to gain lots of jobs from the upstart company. Last fall, Governor

Timothy Kaine estimated that Virginia Cobia Farms would create 60 new jobs for the region.

Virginia Cobia Farms is a joint venture by Martin's fish farm, [Blue Ridge Aquaculture, Inc.](#), of Martinsville, the nation's largest tilapia producer, and [MariCal, Inc.](#), of Portland, Maine. MariCal is a privately held animal health and nutrition biotechnology firm that discovered a way to raise saltwater species in low-salinity fresh water — without compromising taste, texture or nutritional content.

“MariCal's patented process is the magic that the seafood industry needed,” Martin says.

But there is no magic to the process, insists Dr. William Harris, a co-founder, president and chief scientific officer of MariCal.

He notes that many marine fish naturally adapt to variations in salinity and that some species, including salmon, spend part of their lives in fresh water. MariCal's patented technology involves a protein that serves as a calcium-sensing receptor (CaSR), which Harris describes as a “molecular thermostat.”

“The receptor is what allows our bodies, as well as fish, to sense various concentrations of ions, which are salts dissolved in water,” he says. “Just as a thermostat continuously senses temperature and makes adjustments, the calcium receptor in fish serves as a salinity sensor. We've discovered a way to modulate this natural sensor so that marine fish can thrive in water with very low salinity.”

Harris adds, “We don't do anything to the fish. There are no genetic modifications, no antibiotics, no hormones. We're simply signaling this natural sensor. It's sort of like putting your hand over a thermostat to raise the temperature reading. You're not doing anything to the thermostat. You're simply triggering a response.”

The idea for this technology was spawned when Harris was working as a kidney physician specializing in pediatrics. “The movement of salt and water across the kidneys has a lot to do with the body's ability to regulate your blood pressure,” he says. “Well, fish are champion salt and water processors, so the knowledge of what was going on in people with kidney disease actually helped me understand how fish can do the same thing.”

The town of Saltville, named for its salt mines, is well suited to cobia production. “We need salt in very low concentrations to grow our fish,” Harris says. “The location is perfect from a production standpoint. It's also going to be a big economic boost to the area.”

MariCal's chief operating officer, William Thomas, thinks production of cobia and other marine fish in tanks using the company's patented process could help reduce fish imports.

“Today there is no reliable, sustainable supply of a marine white fish species that's produced on a large scale domestically in the United States,” he observes. “Other than wild catch, which has a variety of challenges to produce a constant supply, any other source of marine fish has to come from outside the United States. Cobia gives us the

opportunity to produce a dependable domestic source of marine fish and guarantee a level of freshness and quality that just isn't possible from overseas suppliers.”

Thomas says going to the International Boston Seafood Show helped Virginia Cobia Farms reach two product-development milestones — to establish the company's presence in the market and, more importantly, “to be able to survey the market so we fully understand how to position our product and meet the consumer's needs.”

Established last October, Virginia Cobia Farms will harvest its first crop of cobia this May. “We'll have about 100,000 pounds of fish, but I wish we had three times that much,” Thomas says, adding that demand for the white fish, which has been compared to Mahi Mahi or halibut in taste and texture, is already far exceeding supply.

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*MariCal, headquartered in Portland, Maine was founded in 1996 and is a privately held animal health and nutrition biotechnology company with 26 full time employees with operations in Chile and offices in Alaska, Canada, United Kingdom, and Norway. In addition, MariCal is a joint-venture partner in Virginia Cobia Farms LLC, based in Saltville, Virginia. MariCal is a recognized global leader in aquatic biotechnology possessing 58 issued and pending patents in their field. Natural and environmentally friendly, the specific applications developed from the company's technology do not require the use of either genetic modifications or the introduction of drugs or hormones.*

For more details on MariCal, visit [www.marical.biz](http://www.marical.biz).

For more details on Blue Ridge Aquaculture, visit [www.blueridgeaquaculture.com](http://www.blueridgeaquaculture.com).

For more details on Virginia Cobia Farms, visit [www.virginiacobiafarms.biz](http://www.virginiacobiafarms.biz).