



Blue Ridge to grow salmon at newly acquired West Virginia site

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Blue Ridge Aquaculture of Martinsville, Va., said Tuesday it's acquiring a majority ownership in West Virginia Aqua LLC.

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The operation will be renamed West Virginia Salmon and Trout, and will continue operations at its current facilities.

The new company will shift production from arctic char to salmon and trout, said Bill Martin, Blue Ridge Aquaculture founder and president.

To raise the new types of fish, Blue Ridge will make some improvements to the facilities in West Virginia, Martin said.

"We'll have to modify it somewhat but the site is ideal for growing salmon and trout," he said. "We are also interested in testing some new ways of growing salmon under reduced water salinity conditions."

The company's patented technology, developed by MariCal Inc. of Portland, Maine, could possibly allow salmon typically harvested from salty coastal waters to be raised in tanks fed by the clean clear waters found deep underground the West Virginia mountains.

By using recirculation equipment at its indoor facilities, the company says it can control water quality and temperature to produce optimal growth conditions and maximize water utilization. The company has a strict policy against using growth hormones or antibiotics of any kind, said Martin.

Further expansions at the West Virginia facilities might depend on help from state and local economic development efforts. Expansion would be costly because of the terrain; but Martin said he is hopeful local officials will reach out to Blue Ridge to make expansion possible.

Blue Ridge Aquaculture currently produces tilapia and shrimp at its facilities in Virginia, and cobia via a joint venture company, VA Cobia Farms, located in Saltville, Va. The company is headquartered in Martinsville, Va.

Blue Ridge raises nearly four million pounds of tilapia each year at its 100,000-square-foot facility, and says each week it ships 76,000 pounds of live tilapia to markets in New York, Boston, Toronto and other locations.

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