




## Companies call cobia next 'Chicken of the Sea'

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Calling it the next big thing in aquaculture, Maine-based MariCal Inc. and Virginia-based Blue Ridge Aquaculture plan to spend \$30 million (24.8 million) to grow cobia at an indoor growing facility in Virginia.



“No question about it, I think global aquaculture industry recognizes cobia as the next big fish,” Bill Thomas, MariCal’s senior vice president for marketing and sales, told IntraFish on Thursday. “Its salmon, tilapia, shrimp, and then cobia.”

Virginia Cobia Farms LLC, the joint venture formed between the two companies, will raise cobia at a \$600,000 (€475,173) pilot plant in Saltville, Va.

Eventually, the goal is to produce about 100 million pounds of fish each year, Blue Ridge CEO Bill Martin said.

“Our technology at Virginia Cobia Farms is going to revolutionize the way the aquaculture industry produces fish,” Martin said. “We are solving the seafood industry’s food safety problems with a clean, secure, traceable U.S. protein food supply that has absolutely zero environmental impact. The global aquaculture industry has recognized the potential of cobia, but until now production has been mainly limited to warm water marine production outside of the United States.

“With our indoor fish farming technology, Virginia Cobia Farms will make cobia the new ‘Chicken of the Sea.’ It is our objective to make Virginia the No. 1 seafood producer in the United States.”

The first fish already are being raised at a facility in Saltville, Va., and will reach the marketplace sometime next year, Thomas said.

The companies see cobia as a fish that can have appeal for both retailers and restaurants, he said. Their fine flavor and rapid growth have fueled increasing global demand as a desirable fresh white fish alternative.

Sixty new jobs were created by the project. “We are pleased that MariCal and Blue Ridge Aquaculture have selected Saltville as the site of this cutting-edge aquaculture technology,” said Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine.

Blue Ridge Aquaculture is the largest indoor tilapia farm in the United States, raising nearly four million pounds of tilapia each year at its 80,000-square-foot facility in Martinsville, Va.

MariCal, a biotech company founded in 1996 that has operations in Alaska, Canada, Chile, United Kingdom and Norway, will supply the technology to grow the fish, using a combined water treatment and specialty feed process.

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