

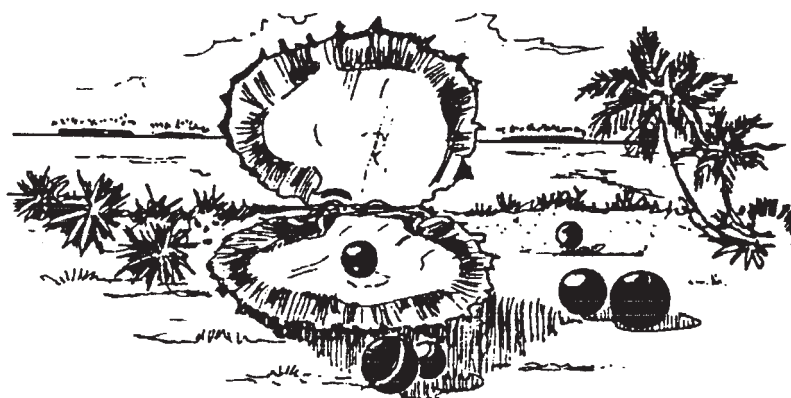
This increased momentum to Pacific pearl culture developments is exciting. As farmers, managers, development workers and scientists, however, we need to maintain a focus on the long term viability of the industry. Realistic projections are needed to keep everyone's expectations in perspective. Guidelines for controlled development, including management and marketing options, need to be openly evaluated.

The promise of pearl oyster hatcheries throughout the Pacific gives rise to a plethora of questions. What level of technology is required? What is the most appropriate size, number, and location of hatcher-

ies? Is protection of broodstock numbers or genetic identity a problem? What can selective breeding programmes achieve, and how soon? What protocols are needed to regulate pearl oyster shipments? Assuming unlimited supplies of spats, what are the limits to growth geographically, ecologically, and economically? What further impetus is required: expanded links between public and private research? greater co-ordination of marketing? training of seeding technicians?

These issues can best be resolved through improved communication. We hope the POIB can continue to foster closer links between us all.

PEARL OYSTER NEWS



Pearl production and marketing in French Polynesia

by Martin Coeroli
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Introduction

Marketing of the French Polynesian black pearl started around 1880 with the few natural pearls occasionally found in oysters fished for mother-of-pearl shells. The rareness of the black pearl produced by the black-lip pearl oyster, *Pinctada margaritifera*, caused it to be called the 'Queen of Pearls' from the start. After successful pearl culture trials in 1965, pearl farming quickly got off the ground.

Pearl production

Pearl production in French Polynesia is now carried out by 105 co-operatives, 180 family businesses and 23 private companies, totalling 2,367 people on 308 pearl farms. Only 149 of these farms were actually producing pearls in 1990. The others are expected to be ready to market their production in 1991 and 1992.

An estimated of 400,000 pearls were produced in 1989, 360,000 of which were exported.

Co-operative marketing

The French Polynesian Government has for the past ten years been providing technical assistance through EVAAM to the co-operatives and family businesses which have combined to form the joint venture 'Poe Rava Nui'. At the 13th pearl auction organised by this consortium, 41,130 pearls were sold for 620.4 million CFP francs. (≈ US\$ 5,640,000)

Pearl exports

Pearl exports have been increasing steadily year by year, in quantity, value and average price. From 1987 to 1989 they rose in quantity from 407.6 kg to 622.4 kg and in value from 2.25 billion Pacific francs (≈ US\$ 20.4 million) to 3.79 billion CFP francs (US\$ 34.4 million).

The average price per gram of pearls rose from 5,523.6 CFP francs (US\$ 50.2) to 6,090 CFP francs (US\$ 55.3) over the same period.

The main export markets are:

Japan:	67.7%
USA:	17.0%
Switzerland:	9.6%
Hong Kong:	3.2%

The Japanese market

French Polynesia ranks second, behind Australia, among pearl exporters to Japan. In 1988 Japan imported 596.7 kg of raw cultured pearls from Australia compared with 182.9 kg from French Polynesia, for 3 billion CFP francs (US\$ 27.2 million) and 1.5 billion CFP francs (US\$ 13.6 million) respectively. The average price works out at 6,933 CFP francs/g (US\$ 63.0) of South Sea pearls (Australia) and 8,676 CFP/g (US\$ 78.8) of Tahiti pearls (French Polynesia).

Development prospects

Since 1984 French Polynesia has been implementing a vigorous pearl farming development programme in which only a dozen atolls are involved at present but which will be shortly be extended to 30 more atolls and about 10 high islands. Increased production will go hand in hand with improved pearl quality. Better spat collection and rearing techniques will be supplemented by hatchery spat production.

Already 1,000 pearl oysters produced in the hatchery in 1987 were grafted in 1990 and 300,000 spat will henceforth routinely be produced each year at the EVAAM laboratory in Rangiroa. The pearl grafts carried out in 1990 allow us to anticipate a doubling of production by 1992, which means that over one tonne of pearls will be put on the market.

Advertising

Advertising campaigns carried out by EVAAM in several countries since 1987 have led to the present boom in the black pearl market.

Sustained efforts have resulted in approval by international jewellery trade bodies of the trade name 'Tahiti cultured pearl' for every black pearl cultured from *Pinctada margaritifera*. This trade name will be guaranteed by a certifying laboratory set up in Papeete (Tahiti).

Conclusion

The marketing strategy adopted by French Polynesia for this product is to increase production while keeping the value high. This rules out mass production, even though potential pearl farming sites in French Polynesia would enable production to be raised to over 7 tonnes.

First pearl auction in Rarotonga

Source: Islands Magazine: "Inaugural black pearl sale nets 803,567 for islanders", by Tap Pryor

The first auction of cultured black pearls in Rarotonga last October fetched a total of US\$803,567 for 24 pearl farmers from Manihiki. Two Asian companies, No-Ah and M.S. Orient Ltd, bought the entire offering of 6,302 pearls at an average of \$128 each, with the largest single pearl going for \$9,000.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Marine Resources has completed a national pearl industry plan, making the Cook Islands eligible for US\$2.4 million over five years to establish a pearl research and train-

ing facility on government-owned Suwarrow atoll, south-west of Manihiki. The results are intended to be fully transferrable to the other lagoons of the Northern Group, with the caveat that each Island Council agree to the national plan. So far, the Penrhyn islanders, with a lagoon five times the size of Manihiki's, have been reluctant participants, preferring to wait and observe the pioneering efforts of their neighbours. Perhaps the success of the first sale will accelerate the Penrhyn Island Council's decision to proceed.

Pearl oysters in Abaiang and Butaritari atolls, Republic of Kiribati

by Being M. Yeeting,
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Introduction

A questionnaire survey was conducted at Abaiang and Butaritari atolls of the Republic of Kiribati in May 1991, mainly to confirm rumours of the presence of the black-lipped pearl oysters (*Pinctada margaritifera*) in the lagoons of these two atolls, and

try and gather baseline information that would indicate the present status of the stocks. An attempt was also made to map the location of the stocks on each island. This should be very useful in the planning of future field surveys.