flaw in 'starting big' is the ease with which errors (which may be difficult, costly, or even impossible to rectify later) can be built into the operation. Particularly in multi-species production, there is surprisingly great complexity in the various facets of production, as is revealed in this book. There is much to be gained by setting up a small project, testing this, experiencing the problems, resolving them, and then incorporating the improvements into any expansion.

A producer with limited resources can reduce his risk by planning growth in small progressive stages. Achieving profitability in each stage before commencing the next will not only help to prevent business failure and provide income as soon as possible, but this careful strategy for expansion should be viewed favourably by any organization approached for financial assistance.

Growth into a large range of varieties strengthens marketplace security, and simultaneously lowers the level of dependence upon individual species or groups. However, on the negative side, more species mean more complexity and demand on technical input. This is especially relevant where the business is dependent on only one key person providing all technical input. Efficiency also becomes increasingly difficult to maintain as the size of the operation increases. This is understandable considering the complexity involved in achieving optimum efficiency in all areas of a large multi-species operation.

8.8 Avenues for expansion

Various figures can be used as indicators of potential for growth. Sales records can be used to determine past and current growth trends. Breedable but currently imported items offer opportunity for import replacement. Consistent shortages in production constitute a very healthy reason for expansion, with the proviso that they are not just temporary, for example seasonal (though this can also be exploited), and that the species are good ones from both production and economic perspectives.

Growth by capture of market share from other local producers will only be possible if one can offer some advantage over them. Too much dependence on this avenue, especially if the total market is small and well supplied, is risky. 'Price wars' too often result only in destabilized prices and financial loss to both target and initiator.

Good new species/strains easily capture market share, but apart from developing rare, suitable chance-mutations ('sports' that occur naturally), their creation is advisedly the domain of the specialist, requiring expertise, time, and preferably some knowledge of genetics. Furthermore, benefits such as the exceptionally high prices that are often paid for new strains will almost definitely be temporary, lasting only as long as it takes other producers to acquire broodstock and start producing them.

It can be very useful to invest an affordable amount in the researching and trialling of new species with good potential, on an ongoing basis. If successful, these can be used to replace poorer species or create opportunities for expansion. Extensive 'research and development' is most sensibly conducted only once the operation is profitable and comfortably able to carry the cost.

Expanding by extending markets into new areas may entail increased transport costs, dealing with changed regulations across borders and so on. By word of mouth, good product and reputation can be expected to result in requests for product from potential new customers, in which case the question will arise as to whether it is better to take on new customers or expand the range of lines to existing customers, or both.

Export may be an option for expanding markets, but presents its own set of demands and complexities and its viability will depend upon, amongst other things, the prices which can be realised in target countries. There are many considerations, some already mentioned, which will need to be studied and assessed.

Specialized marketing opportunities

- Species which can be **grown out to larger sizes which sell at higher prices**, for instance silver dollars, Congo tetras, gouramis, some cichlids and many others, offer an opportunity to increase output without increasing the range of species.
- In some areas, the need for **specific species**, for example for **medical** or **scientific research**, may provide a viable market, though this would be relatively rare.
- **Feeder fish** for feeding predators such as oscars, arowana and others, are in big demand and of course the need is constantly renewed.