



Oral application of living bacteria to shrimp and fish offers some interesting potential benefits. Numerous publications have documented the benefits. Most bacteria do not survive for extended periods of time outside of the environment. A major exception to this is those bacteria that form spores, specifically the *Bacillus* species.

## Oral application of bacteria

Spore forming *Bacillus* species have been shown to benefit shrimp when eaten. The exact mechanism is not clear although there are indications that it may be due to stimulation of the immune response.



AquaPro F is a mixture of selected strains of a number of different *Bacillus* species including:

*Bacillus subtilis*  
*Bacillus licheniformis*  
*Bacillus pumilus*  
*Bacillus megaterium*  
*Bacillus polymyxa*

These are combined with the prebiotic MOS with added enzymes to aid in the digestion of the feed; cellulase, amylase, protease and lipase.

The bacterial load is approximately 2 trillion CFU per kg of product.

There are several different possible routes of application.

### Top Dressing Feed

*Wet Method:* For each kg of feed to be used, add 1-2 grams of AquaPro F to 200 mls of water (50 to 100 grams in 5 liters). Let sit with occasional stirring or aeration if available for 8 to 12 hours. Use this material to soak the quantity of feed that

the dried material was allocated for. Spray on the feed and feed to the shrimp. May be mixed with other materials.

*Dry Method:* Mix the dried material with a little fish oil or water and coat the feed. When the material is applied in the feed or top dressed on the feed as is, without germinating the bacteria first, the spores pass through the digestive tract and are deposited in the feces. They will then finish germinating and begin the job of further digesting the feed. These bacteria will be re-ingested by the shrimp as they forage and consume detritus in the ponds.

### Incorporation in Feed

For optimum performance add 1 to 2 kgs per MT of feed. This is one to two grams of material per kg of feed. The material is fairly heat resistant and given the very high bacterial counts, high levels of spores will survive the milling process colonizing both pond bottoms in feces and recycling through the shrimp.



# True Probiotics for aquaculture? Fact or Fiction?

AQUAculture INformation TECHnology

Biotechnology Benefiting Aquaculture

Probiotics for aquaculture do not exist. Those that work actually do so by bioremediation.

In considering the compositions of these products one has to take into account the bacterial species and the quantity of bacteria in them. Production ponds are heavily populated by bacteria. They are dispersed throughout the water column and the sediments. A number of studies have shown that the culturable bacterial species are very diverse and range as high as several million per ml of water or gram of sediment. A one ha pond one meter deep, with an average of one million CFU (colony forming units-refers to the bacteria that grow on agar plates with the assumption that one CFU is equivalent to one bacteria) contains roughly 10 quadrillion bacteria ( $10^{16}$ ) in the water. The sediment, at one million CFU per gram to a depth of one cm contains 100 trillion bacteria ( $10^{14}$ ). A good quality average product being sold for addition to ponds contains approximately 1 billion CFU/ ml or gram (one trillion CFU or  $10^{12}$  per kg). If one assumes that all of these bacteria will grow in the pond (a dubious assumption at best), then

each kg of product added to a one

Water color change in response to treatment with PRO4000X tablets.



ha pond would result in the numbers of bacteria shown in the table below.

Table 1. Theoretical CFU per ml of water or gram of sediment for

CFU/ml	CFU/gram
100	2000

each kg of a one trillion CFU per/kg product (assumes 100% viability).

guts of fish and shrimp is similar to what it present in the environment that they are living in. Since the pond bacterial composition is already relatively stable and orders of magnitude larger than what is being added it would be a stretch to assume that the bacteria that are being added colonize the fish and shrimp in the pond. Furthermore, it is likely a stretch as well that there is going to be much if any effect on the environment at all.

As an aside, it is important to understand the difference between correlation and causation. Statistically many things can be proven to correlate with each other in the absence of any scientific basis to explain why the observed correlation is scientifically valid. Many things are correlated with each other that have no possible way to be connected. The vast majority of observations that are being touted as proof of efficacy of these types of products are correlative in nature and may also rely on some manipulation of the numbers to strengthen the observed effect. Some studies have even gone so far as to changing the level of significance from the universally accepted  $p < .05$  (the probability of two events being correlated with each other is more than 95%) to  $p < .10$ -the probability is more than 90%. Few statisticians would



*Correlation does not mean causation. It is a statistical manipulation that must be backed up by a scientifically plausible explanation for the mechanisms. Many things that can be statistically correlated are not real.*

So the observations that there are correlations between adding a few hundred bacteria per ml to an environment with potentially tens of thousands of times the levels of bacteria already in the ponds, with impacts on animal health, growth, disease resistance, etc. should be viewed skeptically. There are no magic bullets and there are no super bacteria that will dramatically outgrow the bacteria that are already in the pond. The fact that these products all need to be added repeatedly further strengthens this argument. Furthermore since every pond is unique in terms of its chemical and biological makeup, adding a consistent amount of a given product makes little sense as well. To expect that the same relatively low numbers of bacteria added to a pond will always have the same impact regardless of what is going on in the pond already is not logical.

Aside from this number conundrum sold in a shelf stable reasonably long there is also a problem with the types of bacteria being added. Many different types of bacteria (and fungi) are being sold. The list is far too long for this short article but commonly includes

Lactobacillus species, Bacillus species, Nitrosomonas, Nitrobacter, Saccharomyces species, photosynthetic bacteria such as purple sulfur bacteria, Pseudomonas species, etc. Each of these bacteria has specific properties and for many of them it precludes them being viable in a dried product (or in meaningful numbers in a liquid product).

The bacteria that most people think about when one thinks about probiotics are Lactobacillus species. Several studies suggest that when they are directly fed to shrimp or fish, one can see a measurable and reproducible impact, notably on disease resistance. Claims that these act as probiotics, i.e. binding to and stably colonizing the intestine are simply not supported by the data. The published evidence suggests that more than likely they are acting as non-specific immune stimulants, stimulating protective immunity by acting on the non-adaptive or innate component of the immune system. This does not even require live cells. Note that this is when fed. Currently there are no inexpensive technologies that allow for this genus of bacteria to be

Nitrogen fixing bacteria including Nitrobacter and Nitrosomonas species are natural inhabitants of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. These have very exacting nutrient requirements and are difficult and costly to culture to any high counts. Adding them to degrade ammonia makes little sense biologically as they are in balance with each other in aquatic environments and are inhibited by excess amounts of ammonia and ammonia breakdown products. Furthermore because of the high costs of production when they are actually present in inexpensive products they are typically present at very low levels. Shelf stability in a dried form is also problematic. Keeping in mind the problem with numbers, one can readily see that adding a few million of these bacteria to a pond is likely problematic.

Other bacteria have issues as well. Some products are based on anaerobic bacteria. Since ponds are oxygenated and bacteria usually have to undergo metabolic shifts to accommodate new environments adding bacteria that are adapted to an anaerobic environment, even though they are termed facultative



Even though they are the best candidate for stable bacterial products that are added to the water, they have the same number problems. On the other hand adding them in a format where they germinate (a term that refers to the changes that occur when spores become viable bacteria again), directly on the pond bottom delivers a much greater number of bacteria to where the organic material in the pond accumulates.

Delivery is problematic using the dried powdered products in the market place. These products are typically soaked to allow germination and then added to ponds requiring the bacteria to move through the water column to the sediment.

About 4 years ago we noted these problems and developed a tablet that contains high numbers of Bacillus spores that is added directly to the pond bottoms at the spots where management wants the bacteria to act. Each tablet contains approximately 52 billion CFU. One tablet is about 4 square cms or so and dissolves on the pond bottom within 30 minutes of being added to the ponds. The spores germinate and the bacteria act upon the substrate. In this manner very large numbers of bacteria are added per square cm. The potential bacteria from a single tablet create localized areas on the pond bottom where the Bacillus species in the tablets

overwhelm the bacteria that are present. The bacteria that are contained within the tablets have been selected specifically for their ability to degrade organic material.

In large scale field trials a consistent impact has been noted. Farmers have noted much cleaner pond bottoms allowing shortened times between cycles and the use of less water exchange during the growout cycle. On a farm in Belize, Royal Mayan, they have been using the tablets for three years and have noted that the effects are consistent and reproducible. A few times in the last few years when for various reasons the tablets were not being used, water quality deteriorated with high blue green alga counts and the need to exchange more water returned.

Other clients have observed substantial reductions in organic material as well. Some of have seen changes in the coloration of sediments from an anaerobic black color to a much healthier brown color with significant drops in the production of hydrogen sulfide. In general the effect seems to be one of impacting the amount of accumulated organic material with other impacts being related to this. In hatchery tanks, significant lowering of vibrio counts has been noted, likely as a result of competition of the bacteria in the tablets with the vibrios in the system. Currently clients in

These are tools for improving the environment, not probiotics and are sold as such. The concept of targeted delivery to the pond bottom is a scientifically sound one and given the use of specific bacteria that have been selected solely for their ability to degrade organic matter has resulted in a product that works and for which there is a plausible mechanism of action. Those products that are in the market place that contain Bacillus species act by a similar mechanism although they are limited as discussed due to issues with numbers and delivery mechanisms.