

COMMERCIAL FISHERIES REVIEW

October 1946

Washington 25, D. C.

Vol. 8, No. 10

HAITI AND ITS FISHERIES

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The Republic of Haiti occupies the western third of the Island of Hispaniola in the West Indies. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean on the north and the Caribbean Sea on the south, this republic covers about 10,200 square miles.

Haiti is rugged. Its coastline is irregular, and five mountain ranges cross the country, dividing it into many small valleys and mountainous slopes. Of its population of 2,700,000 French-speaking individuals, about 120,000 reside in Port-au-Prince and the rest live in and around the numerous settlements throughout the country.

The economy of Haiti is almost entirely agricultural. The crowded population secures from the land virtually all of the necessities of life. The per capita income, above the filling of subsistence needs, is said to be about \$20 per year. The Republic's economy places great reliance on the export of coffee. Cotton, log-wood, sisal, bananas, and cacao are other important export items.



Native produce such as edible roots, tropical fruits, corn, nuts, and green vegetables, are the basic foods. Normally, some 7 to 14 million pounds of dry-salted codfish has been imported annually, although during the war, due to transportation and other difficulties, imports dropped to half a million pounds a year. Salt fish supplies have been received mainly from Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, although considerable amounts of low-grade salted snapper and grouper have been shipped from the nearby Bahama Islands.

Unlike those in more temperate areas, tropical surface waters do not become enriched each winter by an inter-mixing with the subsurface, and once the plant and animal nutrients have been withdrawn to sustain living forms, there is no replacement except by upwelling from the depths or by the addition of nutrients from the land.

Haiti's shores are washed on all sides by the North Equatorial Drift of the Atlantic Ocean, which passes, relatively undisturbed, through the deep channels separating the Antilles. By the time this ocean stream has reached the Caribbean, its surface layers have become poor in nutrient salts and, consequently, can support only limited amounts of plant and animal life. The fishery resources, there-

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fore, are restricted to the forms which can exist on the limited food along the coastline and above the coral reefs. The few streams which enter the ocean along

the coasts are quite precipitous and short with a flow that is seasonal in character. Consequently, the food supplies from that source are not very significant.



The coastline of Haiti extends 11,000 miles and includes several large indentations, most notably, the Gonaive Gulf on the west coast. As the 100-fathom curve is found but a relatively short distance offshore along most of the coastline, the area available for bottom fishing is restricted generally to a narrow ledge. Many bays and coves provide shelter for the small sail boats (up to 35 feet in length) used for fishing.

Of the country's 3,000 fishermen, many are farmers. Fish are taken mainly in fish pots, which are fished continuously on the ocean floor, and by seines and troll lines operated when the runs of Spanish mackerel, jacks, or other fishes are in evidence. The catch is sold from the boats or in crude market places, as soon as the fishing vessels reach shore. No live wells are used to bring fish alive to market, nor is ice employed to preserve the catch.

Fresh fish is a popular food in Haiti, but it is scarce and relatively high in price. The catch approximates 2 million pounds a year. In Port-au-Prince, small fish such as sardines and mullet are sold during evening hours on the street corners. For this purpose the vendors use pots filled with deep fat, heated by charcoal fires in movable stoves constructed from 5-gallon oil cans. Gobies, collected in the spring in the river estuaries, are cooked with rice or dried and cooked as biscuits.

The fish population of the area is typically West Indian, embracing several hundred species in a wide range of families. Some tuna, swordfish, marlin, and sailfish are seen along the coasts, and a number of these are taken by sport fishermen. Dolphin, flying fish, Spanish mackerel, and kingfish comprise the other important pelagic fishes. Of these, only Spanish mackerel is taken in quantity commercially. Groupers, snappers, hinds, grunts, squirrelfish, goatfish, parrotfish, and sea bass are the principal bottom-dwelling fishes caught by commercial fishermen. Barracuda, jacks, and sharks are also taken. Mullet, snook, and tarpon inhabit, in particular, the river estuaries. Schools of round herring, silver-sides, and sardines are reported to be abundant along the shores.

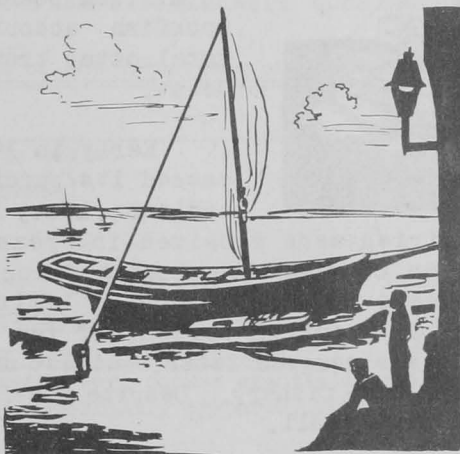
Because Haiti does not have extensive shallow water areas along her coast and as the transient populations of pelagic fishes appear in unpredictable quantities and at irregular intervals, the fishery industries of this country do not present opportunities for extensive expansion. Increased fishing effort might be developed locally for species not now fully used but the returns would not justify the expenditure of large sums for expanded shore equipment, fishing vessels, or fishing gear. The limited resources are now contributing considerably to the subsistence of this republic and attempts to increase the intensity of the fishing effort along the coasts could disrupt rather than improve the present system. In sport fishing, however, it does appear that more exploitation will be advantageous.

This development, which will use such fishes as tarpon and sailfish, will undoubtedly take place in the future as Haiti gradually becomes better known for her tourist attractions.



PUERTO RICO AND THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The per-capita consumption of fish in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands is the highest of all the peoples living under the flag of the United States. The population of 2 million consumes the equivalent of about 150 million pounds of fresh fish a year. Yet so limited is the supply of the island fishery resources that most of this amount must be imported. Only 3 to 4 million pounds are caught locally.



Caribbean fishermen work the waters within rowing or sailing distance of their homes. Seasonally they catch migrating fish by trolling, and all year 'round take bottom species with fishpots and hand lines. Their gear is crude but moderately effective among the coral reefs.