

Maldives sea cucumber farming experience

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Abstract

With recent technological developments and the increasingly intensive interest in tropical sea cucumber farming, it is an opportune time to review the existing strategies of the first successful commercial hatchery in the Republic of Maldives (the Maldives). This may help to understand the success of the hatchery and grow-out operations. This paper analyses the strategies used in the production and grow-out of the commercially important sea cucumber *Holothuria scabra*, and their effects on the local communities and the environment in the Maldives. *Holothuria scabra* has been cultured in the Maldives since 1996. Hatchery production techniques consistently produce high-quality juveniles. When the juveniles reach 2–3 cm in size, they are transferred to nearby company-owned atoll lagoons for further growth. The sea cucumber grow-out period varies between 12 and 18 months in these waters. In addition to the company's own sea cucumber grow-out operation, considerable quantities of juveniles are grown, with similar grow-out periods, by contract growers and villagers from the nearby islands. When the sea cucumbers are fully grown (350–425 g), the local growers sell them back to the company and are paid a management fee according to the duration of care and quantity of the product. The participation of the local community and village groups is one of the reasons for the ongoing success of sea cucumber culture in the Maldives. Sea cucumber hatchery production is a profitable operation in the Maldives, even though the cost of production per juvenile is higher due to the remote location and associated higher energy and transportation costs.

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