

Perch farmer finishes plant

BELL Aquaculture, owner and operator of the USA's largest yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*) farm, has completed build-out of its corporate headquarters and processing facilities in Redkey, Indiana.

Wight & Co began work on the 28,000 sq ft Redkey construction project in July last year, four months after Bell Aquaculture announced its launch in March.

Michael Miller, Bell Aquaculture president & COO, says the construction was completed on schedule.

The new complex is about five miles from the company's fish farm production facilities in Albany, Indiana.

Miller said: "Our new Redkey complex is a fully functioning processing centre for the [company's branded] Bell Perch received from the Albany facility. The newly harvested fish will be processed and packaged as breaded and unbreaded fillets, being ready for shipment within 48 hours of harvesting."

"It's unique [in the USA] that we process our own harvested fish, thereby maintaining vertical



Bell Aquaculture in the USA has finished its new headquarters and processing facilities

Right: yellow perch will be processed and packaged at Bell's new plant within 48 hours of harvesting



integration and control over every step of the process from 'farm to fork'."

The Redkey headquarters will house sales and marketing, human resources, accounting and management. The complex will house around 120 employees at full capacity. Initial production will average 5000 pounds (2.27 tonnes) per month, ramping up to 30,600 lb (13.88 tonnes) a month by August this year.

Last week, Bell Aquaculture announced the

launch of a \$15 million share issue, retaining SDR Ventures, a Denver-based investment bank, to spearhead the campaign.

The raising of equity is the first step in building the yellow perch farm from a current annual production of 180,000 lb (81.65 tonnes) of fillets a year to 8.5 million lb (3856 tonnes) of fillets a year by 2015.

"The greatest difficulty for restaurants has been

the availability of yellow perch out of Lake Michigan and Lake Erie – the two predominant lakes for the supply of wild-caught yellow perch," explained Miller during an interview on WTRC NewsRadio.

"Which means the restaurants that were typically serving customers who enjoy the taste of yellow perch just cannot get the supply.

"The yellow perch that



Pictures: Bell Aquaculture

Bell Aquaculture plans to produce around 82 tonnes of processed fillets this year

we're raising, the Bell Perch, is a higher-quality product from the standpoint that there is no real possibility of contaminants entering into their food chain during their growth.

"We have absolute control over our water supply, since they are raised in-house there is no opportunity for bird predation, pesticides or herbicides to get into the

flesh of the fish that you and I might sit down to eat."

Yellow perch is one of the most popular of all North American freshwater pan fish. It has a mild, sweet flavour with firm white flesh and low fat levels, making it a favourite in residential and commercial kitchens alike.

In past years, yellow perch was the fish typically served at Friday night fish fries in the Great Lakes region.