Lummi Indian's 'Aquaculture' Means Higher Living Standard

Aquaculture may look only like a misspelled word to most, but to the Lumni Indians in Marietta, Washington, it means a chance for a higher standard of living.

Known as the harvesting of fish, oysters, seaweed, and other special sea crops, aquaculture was first introduced to the Indians last summer.

The project is ultimately aimed at training about 100 Lummis to operate a pond system of about 600 acres.

An average income of $6,000 per worker—an increase of $4,000 over the present average family income—is anticipated for the 100 employes.

An experimental crop is now underway and should be ready for market by spring of 1970.

It is expected to produce $60,000 worth of fish and $10,000 worth of oysters.

According to a progress report of the Lummi Business Council, the Indian's initial success came in the face of opposition from several fronts.

Some of the wealthiest white residents who had bought shoreline property on the reservation, the report stated, feared that the ponds might affect their view. The project called for the construction of the ponds on the Lummi Bay tidelands of the reservation.

The opponents petitioned the Army Corps of Engineers to intercede.

When in September, the Indians were still without a permit from the corps, the council decided to begin construction anyway, because, if they waited they would miss the summer growing season—the most valuable season for fish and oysters.

The permit came after the construction had progressed about 700 feet offshore.

The other opponent was the weather. Tides after September are low at night, the report stated, when the work had to be done.

In addition to the darkness the project was plagued with storms, rain, and fog, forcing the men to work 12 hours per day, 7 days a week in their race to complete the dike before the storms could destroy their work.

However, the dike, which was necessary to enclose the ponds in the bay, was only one aspect of the aquaculture project.

The Lummis also built the first oyster hatchery in the Northwest, designed and built a new type of oyster raft on which to load the oyster seed from the hatchery and pioneered the first mechanized deep water harvest system for marine baitworms.

While six Lummis are currently managing the experimental crop, 18 others are undergoing a one-year training course in aquaculture.

When they finish in August of 1970, they will become supervisors in the production program and each will train about five others to operate the initial pond system of 600 acres.

Aimed at producing a minimum of $2,000 per acre per year, the project could result in $1,200,000 per year for their tribe, 50 per cent of which would go to overhead costs.

The tidelands are large enough to provide an aquaculture pond economy for the next 20 years or more.