



# Case Study: Presteigne Trout Farm

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sustainable development training  
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## Aquaculture for the Future

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sector

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## Case Study: Presteigne Trout Farm

### Background

Presteigne Trout Farm is sited on a former country estate in Powys, on the borders between Wales and England. Cultivation of the land dates back around 400 years and it is known that the land had been previously used as a vegetable garden and mill to grind corn for the estate. In 1979 Mr Ieuan Bennett bought the property and set up the trout farm.

All trout are grown conventionally, as it was found that organic production does not provide significant benefits to a business of this size. Despite being a micro-business where the owner operates alone most of the time, only deploying family members where necessary in collecting and boxing fish, Presteigne Trout Farm produces 35 tonnes of trout/year - a total of 100,000 fish.



### The Practice

The trout farm is based on a 'single pass' system, where water is extracted from the River Lugg through a series of filters and makes only one pass through the fishponds before being returned to the river. There is a fast flow-rate of water through the fish farm. This aerates the water and helps keep it free from disease and contamination. Filters placed at the water inlet and outlet prevent rainbow trout escaping from the ponds into the river and also stop indigenous fish from the river getting into the fish ponds. The trout farm also has a back-up aeration system in case there is a reduction in the velocity of the through-flow from the river.

The farm hatches its own stock, buying in fertilised eggs three times a year. Sixty kilos of eggs are bought and they produce approximately 45,000 fry. In the hatchery the river water is augmented by spring water from a source on site. This keeps the water temperature in the hatchery low which is important for the fry and fingerlings. In the hatchery itself, Mr Bennett hand feeds fry and fingerlings prior to them becoming large enough to go into the outside fishponds. They are moved by a pipe and hopper system in order to minimise handling. It takes approximately 14 months from receiving hatching eggs to growing mature rainbow trout ready for the table.

By using the single pass system Mr Bennett is able to minimise his need for additional employees. He relies on family members to process fish for market. Once ready for market the fish are moved through the ponds to a final pond where they are electrocuted. This method of slaughter is preferred to the alternative - often used in more intensive enterprises where the fish are collected and their gills are cut. This is understood to increase the levels of stress and to reduce the quality of the meat.

Source: C.E. Lloyd  
Swansea University



The fish are boxed in the round for distribution to markets in Wolverhampton and Birmingham, (approximately 110 km from the farm) which Mr Bennett attends once every week. Keeping fish 'in the round' rather than gutting and filleting them on site, keeps operations at a minimum level and avoids the need to deal with the resulting waste.

### Opportunities and Obstacles

Mr Bennett feels that one of the main opportunities to his business has always been its geographical location. Situated on the borders of England, Presteigne Trout Farm is ideally placed to distribute to markets in the West Midlands and at present all the fish produced is sent out of Wales. This is likely to remain the situation while transport networks in Wales are limited.

The small size of the business is also a benefit, given the limited markets available; by operating as a micro-business, working alone most of the time and only deploying family members where necessary, he is able to keep operating costs to a minimum and stay in business.

Mr Bennett feels that the main obstacle his business faces is an inability to consolidate the market. In recent years there has been a decline in the wholesale market, with the major supermarkets now being the major customer for trout. A small business like Presteigne Trout Farm is unable to produce enough to secure the large contracts needed to supply the supermarkets. The farm is situated in a rural area with a sparse population. Therefore selling 'at the gate' or from a farm shop is not a viable option. Similarly, while he is aware of the popularity of Farmers Markets, he has no plans to use them as a vehicle to increase sales as this would be too time consuming.