

FISH FARMS IN CONDOS

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An abandoned inner-city warehouse is probably the least likely place you'd choose to set up a fish farm, but Dr. Yonathan Zohar insists it is possible. And not just any fish farm: a saltwater system that produces high-end fish like gilthead sea bream, a European delicacy that is becoming scarce in the wild and is priced accordingly, at \$10 to \$20 a kilo. Zohar has spent almost 20 years developing such a system in his basement lab in Baltimore, where he works at the University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute. He says he has built a better fish farm—one that's self-contained and recirculating (which means it does not need a natural water source nearby for top-ups or waste discharges), not to mention environmentally friendly and financially viable. His final challenge, which may be the toughest, is to find a commercial partner that will use the technology and create a facility to mass-produce fish. The centre has drawn up a business model that envisions a \$4-million (U.S.) investment for a warehouse and equipment that can produce about 180,000 kg of sea bream annually. Zohar says the system could be built "anywhere—in urban communities, rural communities, whether it's the Midwest, near an airport or in any inner city." In Canada, fish farms are big business, with the aquaculture industry reporting record revenues of \$753 million in 2005, the most recent Statistics Canada figures available. More than two-thirds of that production involves salmon. What Zohar is proposing—an enclosed saltwater system made for mass production—is "very rare," says Christopher Pearce, a research scientist in Nanaimo, B.C., who is also president of the Aquaculture Association of Canada. The industry has been plagued in the past by environmental concerns, as when farmed fish escaped pens and mated with fish in the wild, and when fish waste, viruses and bacteria ended up in oceans and waterways. Zohar's system has an answer for every concern: The enclosed system won't allow fish to escape; computerized diagnostic tools monitor for viruses and bacteria levels; and fish waste is processed and recycled by adding microbes. The sludge that's removed from tanks can be converted to methane. Zohar sighs when he acknowledges his system "sounds too good to be true" and cites it as the main reason why, after close to two years of trying, the university has yet to secure a commercial partner. His investor, he says, will need to be "a bit of a visionary." Those, apparently, are very hard to find.

Excerpted from:

["The Future Of Food: 28 ideas, trends and businesses that are changing how—and what—we eat
Even when every other industry's future can appear murky, one thing remains clear: The world's gotta eat. The question is, what are you going to put on your plate?"](#)

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