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Commentary

Innovative Mechanical Devices for Non-chemical Removal of Salmon Lice

Ding Wang*

Department of Aquaculture Research and Development, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

DESCRIPTION

Aquaculture, particularly salmon farming, plays a significant role in global food production, providing a significant source of protein. However, the industry faces numerous challenges, one of the most persistent and detrimental being salmon lice infestations. Salmon lice (*Lepeophtheirus salmonis*) are parasitic crustaceans that attach to salmon, feeding on their skin, blood, and mucus, leading to serious health problems for the fish and significant economic losses for the industry. This article explores the biology and impact of salmon lice, current treatment interventions, and future prospects in managing these parasites in aquaculture operations. Salmon lice are ectoparasites that predominantly affect Atlantic salmon but can also infest other species of salmonids. The nauplius and copepodid stages are free-swimming, while the later stages attach to the host fish. Adult female lice can produce hundreds of eggs, leading to rapid population growth under favorable conditions. The impact of salmon lice on farmed salmon is profound. Infestations can cause severe skin damage, leading to secondary infections, stress, and reduced growth rates. In severe cases, lice infestations can be fatal. Moreover, lice can act as vectors for other pathogens, exacerbating the health problems of infected fish. The economic impact is equally significant, with losses attributed to reduced fish quality, increased mortality, and the costs associated with treatment and prevention measures. Effective management of salmon lice in aquaculture involves a combination of chemical, biological, and physical interventions. Each method has its advantages and challenges, and an integrated approach is often necessary for sustainable lice control.

Organophosphates are chemicals disrupt the nervous system of lice. However, resistance development and environmental concerns limit their long-term use. Pyrethroids are act as neurotoxins to lice but have similar resistance and environmental impact issues. Avermectins are widely used due to their effectiveness, but resistance is an increasing problem. Hydrogen Peroxide, oxidizing agent can be effective against lice but requires careful handling and has variable efficacy.

The over-reliance on chemical treatments has led to the development of resistant lice strains, necessitating the exploration of alternative methods. Species such as wrasse and lumpfish are employed in salmon pens to eat the lice off the salmon. This method has shown potential in reducing lice levels, though it requires careful management to ensure the health and effectiveness of the cleaner fish. These are natural substances or organisms used to control lice. For instance, certain bacteria produce toxins that are lethal to lice but harmless to fish and humans. Exposing lice to elevated temperatures can be effective in killing them. However, this method can stress the salmon if not managed properly. Lice are sensitive to low salinity, and freshwater treatments can be used to reduce lice populations. Devices like lice skirts, mechanical brushes, and lasers have been developed to physically remove lice from salmon. These methods can be labor-intensive and costly but offer a non-chemical approach to lice control. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach that combines multiple control strategies to achieve sustainable lice management.

IPM involves regular monitoring of lice levels, rotating treatments to prevent resistance development, and incorporating preventive measures such as optimized farm management practices and selective breeding for lice-resistant salmon. Advances in genetic research may lead to the development of lice-resistant salmon through selective breeding or genetic modification. Research is underway to develop vaccines that can induce an immune response in salmon, reducing lice attachment and survival. Enhanced monitoring tools, such as underwater drones and machine learning algorithms, can provide real-time data on lice levels, enabling more precise and timely interventions. Continued exploration of natural compounds and biopesticides offers potential new avenues for lice control with minimal environmental impact.

Correspondence to: Ding Wang, Department of Aquaculture Research and Development, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan, E-mail: Dingwang@gmail.com

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