

American Breeders Panel at the 2008 AKCA Seminar

By Jennifer McCann

At the 2008 AKCA Seminar in Jacksonville, FL this June, Quality Koi's Mat McCann got the honor to sit down with other highly respected American koi breeders to discuss the similarities and differences in their breeding of American Koi.

On the panel was Brett Rowley of Brett's Koi Farm in TX, Joe Pawlek of Blackwater Creek in FL and Mat McCann of Nisei Koi Farm in NJ. William Todorsky was the moderator for the panel.

The discussion opened with what is the difference between American Koi farms and Japanese Koi farms. All three breeders agreed that with more land space available here in the States versus in Japan the American breeders have more physical space to experiment with koi breeding, compared to many Japanese breeders who only specialize in a few varieties. The breeders all agreed as well, that the benefit of American Farms is that they are able to supply more high quality koi into the American market as all our koi are sold here in the USA.

How is the current economy effecting the farms? The breeders have seen in increase in the production costs, maintenance costs, shipping cost, but all three have kept their koi prices steady. They did project however, that with the current economic trend that customers can

expect a future raise in koi pricing, not only on domestic koi but across the whole koi industry.

This followed by the question of what made each of their farms different from the others farm. This is where the audience began to see how market placing, geography and funding made the farms so different. Brett's Koi Farm

is owned and operated by Brett with help from his friends with the labor and time consuming jobs, like culling. Brett started off by saying with Texas's warm climate he has an extended growing season, however, the winter that he does have can be quit harsh. This down time in the winter is welcomed, Brett says, to catch up on there duties that are put aside during the busy koi season. He describes the benefit of black clay on his farm which is exceptional for sumi development.



Joe Pawlek, is the owner of Blackwater Creek, an established company supplying in high demand. The farm employes staff to run the day to day operations. Joe says he has a long growing season which he takes advantage of by being able to spawn twice in one season. Joe prefers using liner ponds to grow his koi over mud ponds. He feels that they are easier to control. The advantage he feels his farm has is its large size. They are able to breed the required varieties for the market, but then during his second round of spawning they can experiment with their breeding. He feels this keeps things fun and interesting for him and his staff.

Mat, first points out that his first difference from the gentleman that he is sitting with is that he is an *employee*, not owner and the farm is owned by Mr. Joseph Zuritsky. Mat talks about the short growing season that that Nisei koi farm has being located in the North East and how he has to over comes the cold winter with keeping

and growing the koi in greenhouse over winter and how the cost of heating the greenhouse for such a long period add to his overhead cost. Mat also points out the Nisei Koi Farm is much younger then the other two farms—only 7th year of breeding. Being consider still a new farm he has not yet found a specific pattern of how the mud ponds behave. The benefit the farm has is that it was built on very fertile land which still yields a high volume of daphnia in the mud ponds which is essential for fry to eat during the first few days of life.

Bio— Security was of main interest. Both Brett and Joe say they do not allow any koi to return to their farm. This policy however does limit what breeders are willing to take to shows. They can't take koi that they may have to sell at cut throat pricing just so they don't have to take it home. And, point out that if you want to see their best, you need

to come to the farm. This also limits the introduction of new parent stock.

Mat took a slightly different view, although he does limit what he takes to shows and does not allow koi to return to the farm, he is open to improving his breeding stock and by doing this he must import. Mat buys from only one breeder in Japan—Tosai Sakai, Matsunosuke. The koi are imported in to a isolated greenhouse and are quarantine for a lengthy time period. The quarantine includes all testing for viruses short of euthanizing.

The breeders are cautious about vaccinating their koi, but to different levels. Joe says he would vaccinate with a proven vaccination. Brett says no, that he's seen to many long term effects from vaccination in aquaculture and Mat says at this time he's watching and seeing what comes of these potential vaccines and will decided what best for the farm when and if the time comes.

Continued...

"The Challenge is being an expert at many varieties"

Joe Pawlek

Farming styles—All the breeders share that they are concerned with line breeding and take efforts to keep this at bay. All three also share the same breeding style by doing natural spawning.

It was culling of the koi that again the farms took on their own methods. Brett said that he first culls his koi at 3-8" inches and welcomes his friends to help him with the time consuming task. Joe, said he too culls at a large size so that his staff can easily see the traits he wants them to cull for.

Mat, however, culls at 30-45 days old and about 1.5" and does most of the culling himself. This difference in culling practice again comes down to ability, market, time and finance.

It was pointed out that all three "American" farm have had interaction with foreign breeders, why is this necessary? Brett says its about sharing techniques and advice. "Someone, somewhere has already experienced what you just experienced and they are always happy to share what they had

"Advice can come in the form of a riddle "

Mat McCann

learned." Mat agreed with the Brett's statement and laughs when he admits calling Brett on number of occasions when a circumstance that he hadn't encountered before. He also says that the advice he receives from Japan isn't

always handed out, that it often comes thru as riddle. He gets pieces of a puzzle and its up to him to find the other pieces and put them together.

Joe expressed his enjoyment of simply sharing the hobby with other that enjoy it the same as he does regardless of where they are from. And thru this interaction they learn from each other.

Should koi farms share eggs and milt as other live stock industries do? The unanimous response was NO! Not that they don't want to share out of competitiveness (partially) and not to mention possible bio-security issues, but expressed that parent stock isn't just aquired. Each breeder has to form a relationship with the breeder of the parents he want to purchase. This is a long term relationship and investment. As well, each felt very strong that their individual choose of parent stock for their individual reasoning was what made each farm unique. A sanke isn't just a sanke.

It was evident and expressed that the men are breeding out of true love and passion for koi, not for the money. Working at Nisei Koi Farm myself and being the wife of Mat, I can vouch for the blood, sweat and tears that go into koi farming. Every breeder has experienced the highs and each has experienced the very lows. Only thru their dedication do they find the strength with in to pick up and carry on.

Watching the men on the panel's body language as the others talked—chuckle

and a nod, there again showed how they understood and appreciated what each other does in a way that only someone who lives day in and day out koi farming can.

Yes, of course they are competitors, business is business, and we must all survive. Their farms may be different,

"Someone has already experienced what you are seeing "

Brett Rowley

their farming styles maybe different. but there was respect for each other and the other American breeders for what they are doing to improve American bred koi.

With gentlemen like these three and others heading the evolution of American Koi we are sure to see more high quality koi and possibly a Grand champion in the future.