

Indiana: First in...Goldfish Farms?

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by Mary Giorgio

In southern Indiana, the town of Martinsville is famous for several things. It is the home of [famed](#) basketball coach John Wooden, a highly specialized aerospace firm, and a once popular mineral spring. But at the turn of the twentieth century, Martinsville became famous as home to the first successful goldfish farm in the US.



A small company, The Grassyfork Fishery, started by Eugene Shireman in 1902 eventually put Martinsville on the [map](#) as the Goldfish Capital of the World.

An advertisement for Intuit TurboTax. On the left, there is a small graphic showing a smartphone screen with a man's profile and three other smaller profile icons. To the right of this graphic, the text "Now hiring tax professionals" is written in a bold, blue font. Below this, the text "Work for Intuit® from your home office and help more customer" is partially visible. In the center, the website "turbotax.com" is written in green. Below that is a large blue button with a white right-pointing arrow. In the bottom right corner, there is a small LinkedIn logo.

Martinsville's famed goldfish farm had its origins in 1899. That year, Eugene Shireman inherited some swampy land on SR 37 that was ill-suited for farming. He pondered what to do with the property and eventually had a brilliant idea.

Shireman decided to start a goldfish farm. Goldfish were still a relatively new pet in the United States. The first goldfish had arrived from China just a little over 20 years prior. They were still a novelty, but one that seemed to have the potential to become very lucrative.



In 1902, Shireman purchased 200 breeding goldfish for his farm. Shireman had no trouble selling his goldfish to businesses and retail stores. In fact, his goldfish were so popular that Shireman began purchasing surrounding farmland to expand his business.

Eventually, Grassyfork Fishery became the largest goldfish hatchery in the world. Shireman quickly eclipsed his competition in production volume. He even opened a second Martinsville fishery in 1934 to meet the demand.

Shireman ran the farm until the 1940s, when he chose local athlete Stanley Byrum as his successor. Byrum oversaw operations at the farm until he retired in 1970. The farm was then purchased by a family operation in Missouri called Ozark Fisheries. Current owner Larry Cleveland is a fourth-generation descendant of the fishery's founders.

Today, the Ozark facility in Martinsville contains over 600 ponds and sells over 40 million fish annually. Ozark is the largest breeder of goldfish and koi in the country. During peak mating season, they can hatch 400,000 fish a day.



The goldfish bred in Martinsville are sold all over the US & Canada. They are sent to market via overnight delivery. Surprisingly, this method has an almost 100 percent survival rate.

In 2012, the Morgan County Historical Preservation Society saved the historic Grassy Fork Office Building from demolition. The building was subsequently purchased by local businessman Carl Fenneman for office space. It is now [listed](#) on the National Register of Historic Places.



From a small [experiment](#) in breeding goldfish, Grassyfork Fishery grew into a highly successful multi-million-dollar business. Goldfish make great pets and are relatively inexpensive investments for families. As a result of these [factors](#), the Martinsville goldfish farm continues to thrive over 100 years later.