Amino Acids from Animal Feedstuff Proteins for Aquaculture Species

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An Increasing Role of Aquaculture in Providing High-Quality Animal Protein for Human Consumption, 1980–2022



Globally, aquaculture has been the fastest growing protein sector over the past 20 years.

FAO 2025. Responsible Use of Fishmeal in Aquaculture.

What Is Protein?

Protein: A polymer of amino acids (AAs) joint together via peptide ponds. AA₁-AA₂-AA₃-AA₄AA_n



- --- Protein is the most expensive ingredient in animal diets.
- --- Protein is the most abundant non-water nutrient in animals, including fish, shrimp, and crabs.
- --- Dietary protein is the source of amino acids that are essential for the growth, development, reproduction, immune responses, health, and survival of all animals.

Wu, G. 2022. Amino Acids: Biochemistry and Nutrition. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL

Amino Acids in Protein (Proteinogenic Amino Acids)



Acids (AAs) for A				
Nutritionally	Nutritionally			
Essential AA	Nonessential AA			
Arginine	Alanine			
Histidine	Asparagine			
Isoleucine	soleucine Aspartate			
Leucine	Cysteine			
Lysine	Glutamate	Li P et al. 2011. Amino Acids		
Methionine	Glutamine	37:43-532.		
Phenylalanine	Glycine			
Threonine				
Tryptophan	Serine			
Valine	Tyrosine			

* Based on animal growth.

Animal products also contain non-proteinogenic amino acids that are nutritionally and physiologically essential or beneficial for aquatic species



Non-proteinogenic amino acids = amino acids that do not serve as substrates for protein synthesis.

Wu, G. 2022. Amino Acids: Biochemistry and Nutrition. CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL

Roles of Amino Acids in Growth, Development, Health, Survival, Reproduction, and Seafood Quality of Aquatic Animals



Li P et al. 2009. Amino Acids 37:43-32.

Functional Amino Acids in Animal Nutrition

Functional amino acids: Amino acids that participate in and regulate key metabolic pathways to improve health, survival, growth, development, and reproduction of animals.

Examples: Arginine, Glutamate, Glutamine, Glycine, Leucine, Proline, 4-Hydroxyproline, and Taurine.

They are among the most abundant amino acids in the body and serve as signaling and antioxidative molecules for the functions of the animal.

Wu, G. 2010. Adv. Nutr. 1:31-37.

Fish and Shrimp Have Particularly High Requirements for Dietary Proteins

Fish: 25 to 50% of protein in diets (on a dry-matter basis).

Shrimp: 30 to 55% of protein in diets (on a dry-matter basis).

Pigs: 14 to 18% of protein in diets (on a dry-matter basis).

Poultry: 16 to 20% of protein in diets (on a dry-matter basis).

National Research Council (NRC 1994). Nutrient Requirements of Poultry. Washington, DC.; National Research Council (NRC 2011). Nutrient Requirements of Fish and Shrimp. Washington, DC.

National Research Council (NRC 2012). Nutrient Requirements of Swine. Washington, DC.

Unusual Abundance of Collagen in Fish and Crustaceans

Collagen is the most abundant protein in animals (including fish, shrimp, and crabs) and accounts for 1/3 of total protein in the body.



Collagen contains 1/3 glycine and 1/3 proline plus 4-hydroxyproline.

These three amino acids are highly abundant in animal-sourced protein but are deficient in soybean meal and other plant-sourced proteins.

Li, P. and G. Wu. 2018. Amino Acids 50:29-38.

Traditionally, Fishmeal Has Been the Major Source of Dietary Protein for Fish, Shrimp, and Crabs in Aquaculture



FAO 2025. The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024.

Protein	Fish	
or AA	Meal	
Protein	63.4	
Ala	5.07	
Arg	4.85	
Asn	2.92	
Asp	4.34	
Cys	0.67	
Glu	6.01	
Gln	3.94	
Gly	6.58	10.4%
His	1.51	
Нур	1.86	
lle	3.26	
Leu	5.24	8.3%
Lys	5.29	8.3%
Met	2.02	
Phe	2.78	
Pro	4.25	Pro + Hyp = 9.6%
Ser	2.80	
Trp	0.70	
Thr	4.11	
Tyr	2.36	
Val	3.80	
Taurine	1.01	Plant = 0
Total Cr	1.17	Plant = 0
Cr. creati	ne: Hvp	. 4-hvdroxyproline:

Fishmeal is an abundant source of feed protein with balanced ratios of amino acids for aquatic animals, particularly glycine, leucine, lysine, methionine, proline, threonine, and valine.

Fishmeal also provides high amounts of functional nutrients (4-hydroxyproline, taurine, and creatine) for aquatic animals.

Li XL et al. 2011. Amino Acids 40:1159-1168; Li P and Wu G. 2020. Amino Acids 52:523-542. It Is Not Sustainable to Feed Fish with Fishmeal in Aquaculture.

Fishmeal is an expensive feed ingredient.

Its cost has continued to increase due to heightened demand associated with the expansion of world aquaculture.

The use of fishmeal as the primary source of dietary protein for aquaculture is not sustainable.

Alternative protein feedstuffs to replace fishmeal include soybean meal and animal byproduct feedstuffs (e.g., blood meal, feather meal, meat & bone meal, and poultry byproducts).

> Gatlin DM III et al. 2007. Aquaculture Res. 38:551-579. Hardy RW. 2010. Aquac Res 41:770-776. Jia et al. Adv. Exp. Med. Biol. 1354:237-261.

Prices of Fishmeal (FM) and Soybean Meal (SBM), 1979-2024



World Bank. 2024. https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/commodity-markets

Protein	Fish	Blood	Feather	MBM	PBM	SBM
or AA	Meal	Meal	Meal			
			% (as-fe	d basis)		
Protein	63.4	89.6	82.1	52.0	64.3	43.6
Ala	5.07	7.82	4.18	4.78	4.91	1.95
Arg	4.85	4.91	5.74	3.67	4.63	3.18
Asn	2.92	4.67	1.67	2.21	2.73	2.10
Asp	4.34	6.20	2.92	3.07	4.10	3.14
Cys	0.67	1.92	4.16	0.49	1.05	0.70
Glu	6.01	6.38	4.81	4.05	4.89	4.17
Gln	3.94	4.32	2.86	2.81	3.54	3.80
Gly	6.58	3.86	8.95	8.67	9.42	2.30
His	1.51	5.57	0.88	1.19	1.30	1.13
Нур	1.86	0.51	4.95	2.88	3.31	0.08
lle	3.26	2.54	3.79	1.92	2.32	2.03
Leu	5.24	11.4	6.75	3.56	4.21	3.44
Lys	5.29	8.25	2.16	3.16	3.44	2.80
Met	2.02	1.16	0.75	1.10	1.39	0.60
Phe	2.78	5.83	3.95	1.85	2.36	2.21
Pro	4.25	6.29	11.8	5.86	6.72	3.05
Ser	2.80	4.49	8.80	2.08	2.67	2.12
Trp	0.70	1.30	0.80	0.39	0.49	0.62
Thr	4.11	3.95	3.97	2.42	2.85	1.76
Tyr	2.36	2.86	2.04	1.45	1.84	1.66
Val	3.80	8.21	5.76	2.23	2.89	2.09
Taurine	1.01	0.15	0.014	0.12	0.50	0.00
Total Cr	1.17	0.02	0.014	0.16	0.20	0.00

Cr, creatine; Hyp, 4-hydroxyproline; MBM, meat & bone meal; PBM, poultry byproduct meal; SBM, soybean meal.

Compared to fishmeal, soybean meal contain much lower amounts of some amino acids, such as glycine, 4-hydroxyproline, methionine, proline, threonine, and valine.

In addition, soybean meal lacks taurine and creatine.

Li XL et al. 2011. Amino Acids 40:1159-1168; Li P and Wu G. 2020. Amino Acids 52:523-542. Soybean Meal (SBM) Is a Good Protein Source but Has Some Limitations in Amino Acid Nutrition.

SBM provides adequate amounts of most, but not all, amino acids for aquatic animals, including fish, shrimp, and crabs.

SBM, like other plant-sourced animals, is deficient in glycine, proline, and 4-hydroxyproline, and lacks taurine and creatine.

Historically, glycine, proline, and 4-hydroxyproline have long been considered as nutritionally nonessential amino acids. This notion is now known to be incorrect in animal nutrition.

[Glycine, proline, 4-hydroxyproline, and taurine are functional amino acids in animals including fish, shrimp, and crabs.]

Andersen SM. 2016. Front. Biosci. 8:143-169. Li, P. et al. 2021. Adv. Exp. Med. Biol. 1332:189-210. Wu, G. and P. Li. 2022. Exp. Biol. Med. 247:1191-1201.

Recirculating Aquaculture Systems at Texas A&M University



Aquacultural Research and Teaching Facility **Kleberg Center Facility**

Suehs, B.A., D.M. Gatlin, III, and G. Wu. 2024. Anim. Front. 14:17-23.

Composition of Amino Acids in the Bodies of Fish and Shrimp ^a								
AANS	HSB	LMB	WLS	AASA	HSB	LMB	WLS	
mg/g of body weight								
Arginine	9.80	9.66	11.4	Alanine	9.75	9.60	10.5	
Histidine	3.49	3.47	3.63	Asparagine	5.14	4.95	7.60	
Isoleucine	5.56	5.52	7.21	Aspartate	6.47	6.25	9.12	
Leucine	9.76	9.62	12.1	Cysteine	2.01	1.98	2.81	
Lysine	8.71	8.65	12.2	Glutamate	12.8	12.7	15.9	
Methionine	4.01	4.02	3.68	Glutamine	8.11	8.06	9.83	
Phenylalanine	5.71	5.63	8.01	Glycine	13.1	13.0	13.5	
Threonine	5.73	5.76	7.11	OH-proline	3.03	3.07	2.15	
Tryptophan	1.60	1.62	2.13	Proline	9.49	9.43	11.9	
Valine	6.49	6.46	8.13	Serine	6.93	6.87	9.15	
Taurine	1.10	1.59	2.19	Tyrosine	4.12	4.10	6.56	

^a Li XY et al. 2021. Adv Exp Med Biol 1285:133-168; 169-198.

AANS = amino acids that are not synthesized in animals.

AASA = amino acids that are synthesized in animals.

HSB, hybrid stripe bass; LMB, largemouth bass; Shrimp, whiteleg shrimp

Dietary Provision of Glycine and Metabolic Needs of Juvenile Hybrid Striped Bass^a

Variable	Glycine
Glycine provision from a 60%-fishmeal diet (mg/fish)	491
Glycine required for growth and metabolic function (mg/fish)	834
Glycine needed through endogenous synthesis (mg/fish)	343
Percentage of glycine from diet to meet the need of fish (%)	59
Percentage of glycine from endogenous synthesis (%)	41
^a Suehs, B.A., D.M. Gatlin, III, and G. Wu. 2024. Anim. Front. 14 Hybrid striped bass (5.5–22.1 g) during a 4-week experimental	4:17-23. period.

Glycine is the most abundant amino acid in the bodies of fish, shrimp, and crabs.

Suehs, B.A., D.M. Gatlin, III, and G. Wu. 2024. Anim. Front. 14:17-23.

Effects of Dietary Glycine Supplementation in Fish						
Species	Feeding behavior	Suppl. level (%, DM)	Total dietary Gly (%, DM)	Response variables		
Beluga Sturgeon	Carnivorous	0.25— 1.0%	2.0- 2.8%	 ↑ Innate Immune Response ↑ GSH Synthesis ↓ Plasma Cortisol & Stress 		
Common Carp	Omnivorous	0.5— 1.0%	2.5– 3.0%	↓ Hyperammonemia ↓ Stress Status ↓ Oxidative Stress		
Hybrid Striped Bass	Carnivorous	1.0— 2.0%	3.1– 4.1%	 ↑ Weight Gain ↑ Intestinal Health ↑ Nutrient Retention 		
Hybrid Striped Bass	Carnivorous	1.0— 2.0%	3.2- 4.2%	 ↑ Creatine Synthesis ↑ Glutathione Synthesis 		
Largemouth Bass	Carnivorous	2.0%	3.74%	 ↑ Weight Gain ↑ Protein Retentions ↑ Innate Immune Response 		
Nile Tilapia	Omnivorous	0.5%	1.94%	↑ Weight Gain ↑ Anti-Oxidative Capacity		
Rainbow Trout	Carnivorous	1.0%	2.7%	↑ Protein Digestibility ↑ Lipid Digestibility		

Suehs, B.A., D.M. Gatlin, III, and G. Wu. 2024. Anim. Front. 14:17-23.





Histological analysis of the proximal intestine of juvenile hybrid striped bass fed glycinesupplemented diets for 8 wk.

Glycine supplementation prevented submucosal and lamina propria hemorrhages, as well as submucosal thickening.

Li XY et al. 2023. J Anim Sci 101:1-13.

Effects of Dietary Proline (Pro) on the Survival of Pacific White Shrimp Fed Plant-Based Diets for 8 Week

Diet ^a	Protein	Lipids	Survival ^b	HSI
	in diet	in diet		
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Control + 0.00% Pro	45.7	8.67	61.9	5.66
Control + 0.36% Pro	46.0	8.72	86.3	6.10
Control + 0.58% Pro	46.0	8.58	89.2	5.76
P-value			<0.05	<0.05

^a The basal diet contained 2.02% proline (dry matter basis). ^b 60 h after NH₃ stress. HSI, hepatosomatic index.

> 0.58% vs 0.0% Pro: 44% increase in survival. 0.36% vs 0.0% Pro: 8% increase in HIS.

> > Xie et al. 2015. Aquaculture 448:105-111.

Effects of 4-Hydroxyproline (Hyp) on the Growth of Atlantic Salmon Fed Plant-Based Diets for 88 days^a

Diet	Protein	Lipids	Weight	SGR
	in diet	in diet	gain	
	(%)	(%)	(g/fish)	(%)
Control + 0.00% Hyp	38.0	30.1	136	0.92
Control + 0.07% Hyp	37.7	30.3	147	0.97
Control + 0.14% Hyp	37.8	30.0	155	1.00
P-value			<0.05	<0.05

^a Initial body weight = 110 g. SGR, specific growth rate.

0.14% vs 0.0% Hyp: 14% increase in weight gain and SGR.

Aksnes et al. 2008. Aquaculture 275:242-249.

<u>Single</u> Use of As An Animal Protein Feedstuff to Replace Fishmeal in Diets for Aquatic Animals

Animal-sourced protein feedstuffs produced by the U.S. rendering industry:

Blood meal Chicken by-product meal Chicken visceral digest Feather meal Poultry by-product meal Ruminant meat & bone meal Spray-dried egg product Spray-dried porcine mucosal peptone Spray-dried poultry plasma Fishmeal

These rendered products provide both high content and proper ratios of all proteinogenic amino acids, as well as taurine and creatine.

Any of these feedstuffs can be used as a single supplement to plant-based diets for aquatic animals (including fish, shrimp, and crabs) to balance amino acid content and provide all the needed functional amino acids.

Li, P. et al. 2021. Adv. Exp. Med. Biol. 1332:189-210.

A Combination of <u>Complementary</u> Animal Protein Feedstuffs to Replace Fishmeal in Diets for Aquatic Animals

An example for a combination of animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can be used to further bring about complementary effects.

	Leucine	Lysine	Histidine	Glycine	Нур	Isoleucine	Serine
Blood meal	11.4 (†	8.25 high cont	5.57 <mark>ent)</mark>	3.86 (re	0.51 lativel	2.54 y low conte	4.49 nt)
Feather meal	6.75 (relativ	2.16 ely low c	0.88 content)	8.95	4.95 (higl	3.79 n content)	8.80
50% Each	9.08	5.21	3.23	6.41	2.73	3.17	6.65
(For compariso Soybean meal	on) 3.44	2.80	1.13	2.30	0.08	2.03	2.12

A Combination of Complementary Animal Protein Feedstuffs

Additional example for a combination of animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can be used to further bring about complementary effects.

	Cysteine	Tryptophan	Glycine	Нур
Blood meal	1.92 (high c	1.30 <mark>ontent)</mark>	3.86 (relatively low	0.50 / content)
Meat & Bone meal	0.49 (relatively lo	0.39 ow content)	8.67 <mark>(high con</mark> t	2.88 <mark>tent)</mark>
50% Each	1.21	0.85	6.27	1.70
(For comparison) Soybean meal	0.70	0.62	2.30	0.08

A Combination of Complementary Animal Protein Feedstuffs

Additional example for a combination of animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can be used to further bring about complementary effects.

	Histidine	Threonine	Glycine	Isoleucine
Blood meal	5.57 (high co	3.95 ntent)	3.86 (relatively low	2.54 content)
Chicken visceral digest	0.75 (relatively l	1.99 low content	8.25) <mark>(high co</mark>	3.84 <mark>ntent)</mark>
50% Each	3.16	2.97	6.06	3.19
(For comparison) Soybean meal	1.13		2.30	

A Combination of Complementary Animal Protein Feedstuffs

Additional example for a combination of animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can be used to further bring in complementary effects.

	Histidine	Lysine	Glycine	4-Hydroxyproline
Spray-dried poultry plasma	3.66 (high co	6.85 ntent)	3.40 (relative	0.021 ely low content)
Feather meal	0.88 relatively low	2.16 content)	8.95 <mark>(high</mark>	4.95 content)
50% Each	2.27	4.51	6.18	2.49
(For comparison) Soybean meal	1.13	2.80	2.30	0.09

Use of Animal-Sourced Protein Feedstuffs to Replace Fishmeal in Diets for Aquatic Animals

Feedstuff	Inclusion rate in diets			
Blood meal	8 to 20%			
Poultry by-product meal	20 to 30%; can replace 80% fishmeal			
Feather meal	15% (for salmon) 20 to 25% (for rainbow trout) ≥ 10% for other fish			
Meat & Bone meal	10% (for yellowtail) 24% (for rainbow trout, tilapia gilthead seabream); 30% golden fish			

Spray-dried porcine plasma 5 to 7.5% (for salmon)

Use of Rendered Products to Replace Fishmeal in Diets for Rainbow Trout

Ingredients	Percent		
Fish meal	25		
Corn gluten meal	12		
Poultry by-product meal	12		
Soybean meal	8		
Blood meal, spray-dried	5		
Feather meal	5		
Wheat	12		
Vitamins and minerals	2		
Dicalcium phosphate	1		
DL-Methionine	0.5		
Lysine HCL	0.5		
Fish oil	17		
Total	100		

Bureau DP. 2006. Essential Rendering. pp 179-194

Use of Rendered Products to Replace Fishmeal in Diets for Largemouth Bass

Li XY et al. 2021. Amino Acids 53:33-47

* Dry matter (DM) content in diet = 96%

Ingredient [% of dry matter	Dietary groups					
(DM)]	FM54	FM30	FM15	FM10	FM5	
Fish meal, menhaden ¹	78.37	43.54	21.77	14.51	7.26	
Poultry by-product meal	_	22.13	35.97	40.58	45.19	
(PBM) ²						
Soybean meal (SBM) ³	_	17.50	28.44	32.08	35.73	
Poultry fat ⁴	5.96	2.20	_	_	_	
Fish oil menhaden ⁵	_	2.84	4.49	4.30	3.69	
Dextrinized starch ⁶	5.00	4.60	4.40	4.40	4.30	
Vitamin premix ⁷	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Mineral premix ⁸	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	
Cellulose ⁹	7.53	3.70	1.23	0.35	0.00	
Choline chloride	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	
Composition (DM basis)*						
Crude protein (CP, %)	54.0	54.0	54.0	54.0	54.0	
Crude lipids (%)	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.0	13.0	
Phosphors (%)	2.52	2.21	1.79	1.75	1.44	
Calcium (%)	4.26	3.29	2.59	2.11	1.98	
Energy (kJ/g of DM)	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	18.2	

FM54, FM30, FM15, FM10, and FM5 denote that the diets contained 54, 30, 15, 10, and 5% of fishmeal CP, respectively

	Body weight (BW; g/fish)					
	Initial	Day 14	Day 28	Day 42	Day 56	
FM54	4.93	12.0 ^a	18.6 ^a	25.5 ^a	35.0 ^a	
FM30	4.95	11.8 ^a	18.4 ^a	25.7 ^a	34.9 ^a	
FM15	4.93	11.3 ^b	17.8 ^b	24.8 ^b	33.4 ^{ab}	
FM10	4.94	11.0 ^b	17.9 ^b	24.2 ^c	32.3 ^b	
FM5	4.90	11.0 ^b	17.2 ^c	24.4 ^{bc}	32.2 ^b	
Pooled SEM	0.02	0.10	0.11	0.15	0.33	
P values		< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	

Growth performance of LMB fed diets with different fishmeal levels¹

FM54, FM30, FM15, FM10, and FM5 denote that the diets contained 54, 30, 15, 10, and 5% fishmeal CP, respectively. The total content of CP in each diet was 54%. The diets were fed to largemouth bass (LMB).

Poultry byproduct meal can replace 72% of fishmeal in diets.

Li XY et al. 2021. Amino Acids 53:33-47.

Use of Animal-Sourced Protein Feedstuffs for Feeding Shrimp

Feedstuff	Inclusion rate in diets
Blood meal	3 to 5%
Poultry by-product meal	30%; can replace 80 to 100% fishmeal
Feather meal	33% (without Lys or Met supplement) 66% (with Lys and Met supplement)
Meat & bone meal	can replace 60% fishmeal

The feed composition of different shrimp feeds.			(Li XY and Wu G. 2020)			
	20 FM - 0 N	20 FM - 5 N	20 FM - 10 N	15 FM - 5 N	15 FM - 10 N	
Fishmeal	20	20	20	15	15	
NOVACQ TM a	0	5	10	5	10	
Soybean meal	10	10	10	10	10	
wheat flour	15	15	15	15	15	
PBM	35	35	35	40	40	
Soybean oil	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	
Soy lecithin	1	1	1	1	1	
Cholesterol	1	1	1	1	1	
Vitamin C	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	
Choline chloride	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	
K ₂ HPO ₄	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.6	
MgCl ₂	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	
Astaxanthin 5%	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	
Premix ^b	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	
Cellulose	10.37	5.37	0.37	5.37	0.37	
Composition (% based on dry matter)						
Dry matter	94.2	96.6	95.5	93.7	95.2	
Crude protein	43.0	43.7	43.9	43.2	44.0	
Crude lipid	9.7	9.9	9.9	10.6	10.3	

Poultry byproduct meal can replace 73% of fishmeal in diets for white-leg shrimp.

(Pacific white-leg shrimp; Litopennaeus vannamei). Initial body weight = ~ 2.6 g

Summary

1. Animal-sourced feedstuffs provide sufficient and balanced amounts of amino acids to improve the growth, health (including intestinal health), and productivity of animals.

2. Animal-sourced feedstuffs are rich in functional amino acids, such as glycine, proline, 4-hydroxyproline, and taurine that are low or absent in plant-sourced feedstuffs.

3. Animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can be used alone or in a complementary combination to achieve their effects in the nutrition of aquatic animals.

4. Animal-sourced protein feedstuffs can replace up to 80% of fishmeal in diets for aquatic animals.

Text/Reference Books on Animal Proteins, Amino Acids, and Animal Nutrition Published Dr. Guoyao Wu



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