

there's better feed and better water," said Swanson.

The lake is also free of parasites which allows it to be graded for export to the U.S., said Tucker. Other lake grades are "continental" — for domestic or European use; and "cutter" — for processing.

Commercial fishing in Lake Diefenbaker started by accident. The whitefish were originally stocked in the lake as food for lake trout, but they did so well that harvesting was eventually deemed necessary.

Experimental harvesting took place in 1976-77 and in 1978 the first full quota was established.

Ten commercial licences are available for the season, with most going to people from the area. However, two fishermen have been coming from Big River since fishing began at the lake.

Dennis Stamnes and Ross Vollmer, Loreburn area farmers, have made a substantial investment in commercial fishing, importing a custom-made boat from Prince Rupert, B.C.

Stamnes, who fished off the west coast for 17 years before returning to farm nine years ago, said the craft is similar to those used by herring fishermen.

Extremely wide, the boat is easy to work out of in calm weather, but because of its flat bottom, does not handle well in high waves. Stamnes said he may take the boat back to Prince Rupert to have a v-prow installed.

Vollmer had no commercial fishing experience before starting the Lake Diefenbaker operation. Now in his second year of fishing, he can clean three fish a minute — which is almost as fast as experienced

west coast fishermen, said Stamnes.

The fishermen work with 18 gill nets, each 91 m (100 yards), usually tying two nets to one "string." The working day starts at dawn, with each string of nets brought into the boat, emptied of fish, then reset. It's usually late in the evening when the last fish is cleaned and ready for delivery to the packing station.

The nets are set quite close to shore where whitefish come to spawn.

Passing sports fishermen watch with envy as the commercial fishermen draw in their nets. The catch usually includes dozens of sport fish such as walleye, jack, lake trout and rainbow trout, which Vollmer calls "junk." These specimens cannot be sold because of mercury content and, if dead must be delivered to tourism and renewable resources personnel.

Whitefish have safe mercury levels because of their lower position on the food chain, said a department resource officer.

Stamnes and Vollmer had a shaky start in the fishing business last year when inexperience with lake fishing techniques and bad weather combined to reduce the catch. However, this year has been a vast improvement, with catches as high as 800 kg (1,800 pounds) of gutted fish a day. The major problem so far has been finding people to clean fish as quickly as the boats bring them in.

Although they are working in an unfamiliar element, Stamnes and Vollmer don't find fishing much different from farming: honest hard work when things are going well, and severe frustration when bad weather keeps them off the lake.