MICROBIOLOGICAL QUALITY OF WHOLE NILE TILAPIA (*OREOCHROMIS NILOTICUS*) STORED IN ICE.

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The spoilage of fresh fish is mainly caused by microbial action. The objective of this study was to evaluate the microbiological quality of Nile tilapia whole stored in ice. The tilapia were collected, washed and stored in cool box, containing flake ice (0°C) in the ice: fish ratio of 1:1, for 12 days. The box was stored in refrigerator at 4°C. Microbiological evaluation consisted of the following parameters: total viable counts (TVC), total psychrotrophic viable counts, *Staphylococcus aureus* positive coagulase counts and most probable number of total and fecal coliforms. In the analysis, were utilized muscle portions of the dorsal, ventral and caudal regions, which were crushed and homogenized. It was used the methodology proposed by American Public Health Association (APHA) and International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF). The results were compiled and analyzed by descriptive statistics to obtain averages. The TVC counts ranged from 2.67 to 6.33 log cfu/g. The total psychrotrophic viable counts ranged from zero to 6.29 log cfu/g. *S. aureus* positive coagulase was not found during the storage time. The estimated counts of total and fecal coliforms were less than 1.2 cfu/g during storage. Thus, it is observed that the bacterial flora responsible for the decomposition of the whole Nile tilapia is mainly composed of psychrotrophic. The whole Nile tilapia presents microbiological quality acceptable by the standards of ICMSF after 12 days storage in ice.