FROM THE FARM

Thuan An: the farmers’ experience

“We would say to other farms who want to be ASC certified that you should do it before your customers request you to do so.”

Nguyen Khanh Ngoc, Quality Assurance Manager, Thuan An Farm

Nguyen Khanh Ngoc, Quality Assurance Manager, explains how Thuan An’s top management recognised how ASC certification would ensure the company’s competitiveness.

Why we chose ASC certification: Our clients had not required us to provide ASC certified products; however, we decided to improve our aquaculture management systems to meet the ASC Pangasius Standard. Having ASC certification would give us access to the higher-end market and ensure the long-term sustainability of our organisation.

Negative environmental impacts of pangasius farms used to be and still are the biggest concern for our buyers. The ASC programme enables us to demonstrate that our farms do not adversely impact the environment or local communities.

What make us different? After more than a year since achieving ASC certification we have reduced the mortality to around 10 per cent and increased our feed use efficiency (FCR < 1.68), which has reduced production costs.

In addition we have better disease control; better control of risks related to farm activities, such as environmental pollution, escapes, food safety and safety in the workplace; and more effective communication with the local community.

Reducing negative impacts on the environment: We were fortunate because our own laboratory was already ISO 17025 certified and we were developing testing methods on the main parameters of water quality. This gave us an advantage in meeting the ASC requirements for water usage, discharge and quality testing as well as allowing us to take appropriate actions in time.

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To bring our farm up to the ASC Pangasius Standard, we established a system to monitor the quality of discharge water, sludge and fish mortality. We also invested in upgrading our infrastructure, ensuring that there was enough space for a waste treatment system. This had the additional benefit for us of reducing the risk of disease outbreak.

We have a subcontractor that collects our sludge and makes compost out of it for agriculture; we also reinforced the pond embankments to prevent fish escapes during flood seasons. In addition, we document our growing technique to ensure feed is used efficiently. This has had positive benefits for food safety and controlling the mortality of pangasius on the farm.

Supporting employees and the local community: Our efforts were not without their challenges and we faced difficulties in achieving the ASC standard. In particular there was a lack of awareness by employees of the new processes that we were implementing and the reasons behind what we
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Fuljencio, whose family lives from the fish ponds that Regal Springs provided.

As part of our social commitment we developed a system for resolving conflicts with communities during the preparation of our participatory social impact assessment (p-SIA). Steps we took included gaining support from the local authority and relevant associations to reconcile outstanding conflicts from the previous owner of the farm, creating a fund to support the livelihoods of local people and donating around 120 million Vietnam Dong per year to it.

The money is used by the surrounding community for products and services such as water, consumables and food. It also allows the local community to participate in social activities including giving rice free of charge to poor households and repairing country roads.

**What would you say to someone who is thinking of applying for ASC certification?** We would say to other farms who want to be ASC certified that you should do it before your customers request you to do so.