



Seven questions about ASC-certified shrimp farms

Ecological, social, sustainable – but not necessarily better in quality

At the end of September, the Ecuadorian shrimp exporter Omarsa was certified as the first shrimp producer in the world to comply with the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) Shrimp Standard. FischMagazin asked the ASC what distinguishes an ASC-certified shrimp farm.

ASC-certified farms reduce their impact on the environment. How does this happen in practice?

The ASC Shrimp Standard for responsible aquaculture targets the major environmental impacts of shrimp farming. The use of antibiotics in ASC-certified farms should therefore be kept to a minimum. Using antibiotics before a disease is

diagnosed and the uncontrolled use of antibiotics if a disease has been detected creates unnecessary risks and are therefore prohibited. Certified farms must develop a health plan to fight bacteria. Only antibiotics that have been approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and prescribed by a qualified veterinarian may be used. The Shrimp Standard

encourages the use of alternative measures of disease prevention in place of pharmacological treatment. The ASC Shrimp Standard also prohibits any shrimp feed containing antibiotics.

In order to protect the farms' surroundings, there are strict regulations on where breeding sites can be situated. Breeding in nature

From the end of 2016, feed used in ASC-certified farms must only contain marine ingredients from MSC-certified fisheries or waste from processing plants. Photo: Feeding in an ASC-certified shrimp farm.

reserves is prohibited. The farms must have an expert study on biodiversity carried out and are required to publish the results in the local language. Natural wetlands and mangrove ecosystems must not be destroyed when setting up the farms. For farms built before 1999, there are strict regulations regarding the restoration of the natural environment. Farms built

after 1999 must not be situated in mangrove areas or in natural wetlands.

In 2013, the ASC launched a project for responsible feeding to develop a new global ASC feed standard by 2016. In order to prevent overfishing and to ensure that feed ingredients do not come from poorly managed fisheries, from December 2016 the Shrimp Standard requires fish meal and oil used in feed to come exclusively from MSC-certified fisheries or from waste from fish-processing factories. Five years after the standard has been adopted, soybean and palm oil in feed must only come from certified sources.

ASC-certified farms protect the rights of farm workers and the local communities. What does this mean specifically?

A co-determination assessment must be carried out by an experienced, qualified auditor. This concerns the farmers' social affairs as well as ensuring fair contracts with farmers and involvement in the community. The ASC's social and community principles are based on principles from the International Labour Organization (ILO): they prevent child and forced labour and discrimination, they promote the establishment of health and safety regulations for workers, fair wages and working hours, freedom of association and autonomy in wage bargaining.

The communities have the opportunity to participate in the assessment process. During the assessment, the impact of the aquaculture systems on social minorities and those at risk of discrimination is taken into account. Wherever possible,



ASC-certified shrimp have been produced taking into consideration ecologically and socially responsible methods. Certification provides no indication of the quality of the shrimp per se.

ASC-certified farms must employ local people. The eight farms in Belize in Central America that have undergone an ASC evaluation serve as an example: they work together with community leaders along the so-called "shrimp belt". Together, communities and shrimp breeders develop strategies to protect the natural resources in the region and workers on the farm are recruited from the surrounding communities.

How do European commercial enterprises support producers?

Binca, founded in Munich, has supported its breeders in obtaining ASC certification in many different ways. The company has provided training, has helped monitor the entire certification process and has contributed towards costs. The company also helps its producers implement the often highly complex Participatory Social Impact Assessment (PSIA) and the Biodiversity-Inclusive Environmental Impact Assessment (B-EIA).

In October 2014, ASC certification was awarded to the Black Tiger Shrimp Farm in Vietnam, which Binca operates together with its partner Thadimexco. As a family-owned business with three small farms in which shrimps are bred extensively, Thadimexco complies with the Binca philosophy. Binca purchases the breeder's entire production, thus giving the farmers financial security.

Lenk Seafood Services (in Bargteheide, North Germany) also supports its producers during the certification process. If the importer finds a potential partner farm, they speak to the breeder proactively and encourage them to obtain certification. Lenk also suggests potential consultants that can assess the farm in preparation for the audit and will occasionally contribute towards the associated costs, if required.

What requires the largest investments?

That depends entirely on the farm. Some of the certified farms have already introduced improved

production methods before opting for ASC certification. For these farms, the additional costs for fully conforming to the ASC standard are correspondingly lower compared to those that only began to change their production methods as part of the ASC audit. Incidentally, it has been noticed that applying for certification and all of the associated improvements can result in lower production costs. Such advantages can sometimes outweigh the costs of certification.

Could you provide technical details of how farms ensure a cleaner seabed, cleaner water and healthier fish?

The impact of shrimp farming is significantly reduced by ASC certification. Water pollution is reduced, for example, as fewer drugs are administered – and even then only ones that have been approved – and less sediment flows out into rivers or into the sea. In addition to using water responsibly, ASC certification can also help to prevent the salinisation of groundwater and agricultural land. Several requirements also aim to reduce water pollution from fish waste that, when either dissolved (ammonium, nitrates) or in solid form (faeces), can result in the nutritional enrichment of the water, consequently leading to adverse effects such as algal blooms. In Belize, for example, the farms use mangroves as natural biofilters. The water flows through them before entering streams.

Considering that shrimp farms have only recently received ASC certification, examples from breeding other species may serve as an example. For instance, a system for breeding

pangasius has been established in the Vietnamese Thuan An province that makes it possible to monitor effluent water, mud and fish mortality.

In general, the ASC standard is goal-orientated: the farms are not subject to technical regulations on what they have to do, but rather what targets they must achieve. For instance, there are fixed limits regarding the reduction of certain chemicals in effluent water. How these are met is left to the breeders' discretion. This helps to promote innovation.

Can you provide figures on the extent to which some contaminants such as antibiotics or phosphates have been reduced in the effluent water of ASC-certified farms?

Since the currently certified farms have only just received their certification, it is too early to say just yet. Usually, the farms that are first to have themselves assessed for a such a standard as the ASC already start with a better baseline. Greater ecological and social gains are usually expected for farms that only join the certification scheme at a later stage.

Under certain circumstances, can a shrimp product from an ASC-certified farm be noticeably different with regard to texture and taste for example?

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