Throughout Asia, just as in the rest of the world, an interest in healthy eating has led to a rise in demand for food and drinks of higher quality. Consumers are now making the effort to find out where their food comes from, subsequently driving the trend for transparency within the food industry, as reflected by the emergence of labels, sustainability claims and eco-signs.

Meaningful labels and explanatory packaging can provide straightforward information to help consumers make informed choices. Food packaging these days will list exactly what ingredients are contained in the product, including sources from which the ingredients originate, aiming to provide consumers with a clear, complete and accurate description of the contents.

More Standards Available

No sector of the food industry has been left untouched by the growing demand for responsibly produced food. Considering the limited amount of resources available and the possible threat of extinction faced by some species, responsibly sourced seafood is of particular interest to the public. In response to this, food producers are beginning to adopt sustainability standards and certifications to demonstrate the environmental merits of their products. Consequently, hundreds of ecolabels and other standards have surfaced to meet the demand. In the seafood industry, reputable standards organisations such as the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) offer certification and ecolabels that can offer consumers extra peace of mind when it comes to buying seafood.

The ASC Certification

An independent, international organisation, the ASC aims to transform the aquaculture industry to a higher standard through a global certification and labelling programme. ASC certification helps reduce the environmental and social impacts of aquaculture, which is vital to ensuring a steady supply of quality fish in the future. ASC standards focus on good management practices covering the conservation and quality of water resources, no misuse of antibiotics, minimising escapes as well as compliance with strict feed requirements and social responsibilities. The certification system meets international codes of good conduct, including FAO Guidelines for eco-labelling and ISEAL Standard Setting Codes.

All fish farms that attain ASC certification adhere to strict social and environmental standards and, as these farms gain certification, they gain access to retailers and consumers committed to making responsible choices that positively influence the environment. In addition to the program for farm certification, producers and retailers can apply for a chain of custody license to use the ASC logo on menus, packaging, and marketing materials to show their customers that the product originates from a responsible source.

Greater Opportunities

Farms voluntarily apply for the ASC programme and, if they pass a stringent assessment process, they can sell their products as ASC certified. Hainan Sky-Blue Ocean Foods Co. Ltd’s tilapia farm, Qionghai Zhongpingzi Grobest, which is based in Hainan Island, was one of the first Chinese farms to achieve ASC certification. According to Mr. Yang Hua-Ying, Deputy Executive Director, Hainan Sky-Blue Ocean Foods Co. Ltd, it was important for Grobest
and Hainan Sky-Blue to participate in the programme and to achieve ASC certification.

Being vertically integrated from feed to aquaculture to processing, the company ensures that they minimise their environmental impact at each stage. These responsible practices translate to an increase in opportunities to access the market. Mr. Yang Hua-Ying explains, “The ASC certification allows us to prove to our customers that we are committed to responsible aquaculture. ASC certification is like a boarding pass, granting the aquaculture producer a sustainable flight to reach the worldwide consumer.”

The ASC is a market-based programme, designed to create incentives and reward responsible farming practices. It also promotes and rewards responsible fish farming though the use of the ASC on-pack logo. The ASC logo provides companies with a competitive advantage. The logo is proof of achievement in a market leading programme for the production of quality farmed seafood. As European retailers and food service providers, in particular, are keen to buy ASC certified products, Asian products with the ASC logo will be better able to gain access to western markets.

**Consumer Empowerment**

Clean labelled products empower consumers in the same way ASC labelled products empower buyers with the choice to support farmers who share their values and give them confidence that their purchases will make a positive contribution to the oceans’ health, the local ecosystem and workers’ rights. The logo assures buyers that the fish they purchase has been responsibly sourced, with minimal impact on society and the environment, and is fully traceable back to a well-managed farm. This way, the logo provides a clear message to consumers that they are making the right choice for themselves and their families.

### A Permanent Change

Indeed, a considerable amount of the man-made pressures on the environment are the result of food consumption and production trends and patterns, which fundamentally change the way food is produced, processed, transported and consumed. As more farmers choose to produce responsibly and more companies choose to source from these responsibly producing suppliers, the number of farms in the programme will grow and the benefits of the programme for the environment and local communities will extend accordingly.

The demand for products to meet these requirements is growing, and it is clear that the interest in traceability and certification is not a trend. What we are seeing now is the beginning of a shift in how consumers make choices about fundamental matters that are important not only to their health but also that of their families, the community and the environment. Major manufacturers and suppliers are also starting to make commitments to adopt certification for their whole supply chain or product offering, rather than a single product line or ingredient. FBA

---

**FOOD & BEVERAGE ASIA APRIL / MAY 2016 19**