ASC Case Study: Lenk Seafood Services

German company, Lenk Seafood Services, is the proud owner of ASC-C-00001: the very first ASC chain-of-custody certificate. Lenk Seafood brings responsibly farmed products from Asia to Germany and other European countries. Managing director Heiko Lenk explains how the company became involved in the ASC programme and what the certification has brought them.

**Company profile**  Prior to establishing Lenk Seafood in 2003, Heiko Lenk already had more than 20 years of experience in the seafood trade in Asia. In 2013, the annual turnover was more than 10,000 tonnes of shrimp and ASC certified pangasius and tilapia fillets. With its own head office in Bangkok, Lenk Seafood has close access to the sourcing and production areas in Asia. The consumer market is served from Germany.

**Why did you choose ASC?** In 2010, we launched our own consumer brand TopSea to bring premium quality, responsibly farmed fish products from Asia to the market. We positioned the brand just below ‘Bio’, organic in English, the highest sustainability label in Germany. The responsibly farmed products were in compliance with the AquaGAP standard. At the time, however, the market was not interested in – and not willing to pay extra for – responsibly farmed, certified products of premium quality. It was a frustrating period for us.

But, in 2011, the introduction of ASC was announced. We became involved because we believed in it right away. Consumers, especially those in Germany, know about MSC, so ASC as a counterpart would make the messaging so much easier.

In 2012, we were one of the first companies to bring to the market ASC certified tilapia under our brand TopSea. This brand now solely comprises ASC certified products.

Other products that are awaiting ASC certification have the GLOBALG.A.P. certification.

**What are the benefits of ASC certification?** Our responsibly farmed, premium quality fish now bears the recognisable, independent on-pack ASC logo, having the logo on our TopSea packaging is the icing on the cake. This motivates retailers to become involved.

“We became involved with ASC because we believed in it right away.”

In the summer of 2012, we brought the first ASC certified tilapia products to the market under the TopSea brand. Now, our products are sold at all major retailers in Germany and even in some discount stores. This is all thanks to having ASC certification. So the frustration of a couple of years ago has changed into pride: as a modest company, we were able to establish a strong position for our own brand.

In addition, ASC has also helped in restoring the reputation of pangasius, which suffered from negative publicity in 2011. It takes time to update media, retailers and consumers on the current status. But, we believe that it’s now improving.
What are your plans for the future? We will concentrate on responsibly farmed seafood. A big challenge in 2014 will be the launch of ASC certified shrimp: something which we have already been working on for a couple of years. We have convinced our producers to go for responsible farming which meets the ASC standards. It is a difficult process which involves investment and working together as partners. We do this with full conviction as we really believe in it; ultimately, the farmers will benefit as well. But it is not an easy process, particularly in the case of shrimp, where demand outstrips supply.

What would you say to someone who is considering ASC certification? You really have to be committed. This starts with finding the right suppliers and aiming for partnerships. You have to work on this together, day by day and it requires perseverance. You need to believe in long-term relationships with your suppliers and not solely look at price.

Applying for ASC chain-of-custody certification? Becoming ASC chain-of-custody certified was more or less a formality as a company like ours works with a lot of numbers and strict procedures for registration.

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Besides shrimp, we are also looking at other aquaculture products that will hopefully become part of the ASC programme in the future. One example is barramundi, which is currently GLOBALG.A.P. certified.