ASC Case Study: Queens

Dutch company Queens is a frontrunner in supplying Dutch and German consumers with responsibly farmed, ASC labelled fish products. Harry Hoogendoorn, managing director of Queens, explains why they choose ASC and its impact on Queens.

Company profile Queens was established in 1994. The company is a market leader in the Netherlands for frozen fish fillets for the retail sector. The leading products are pangasius and tilapia fillets, all of which Queens changed to ASC certification. Products are marketed under the company’s own brand name.

From the start, Queens has focused on a range of frozen products, including fish, with one of the first being Norwegian salmon. Queens still works with the same supplier today, which is characteristic of the company’s philosophy; cooperating on a responsibly produced quality product and developing the market together. Above all, sustainability is fundamental to Queens’ approach.

Why did you choose ASC? We aim for independently certified products for our entire range. We were among the first to offer the Dutch retail sector MSC labelled sustainably wild caught fish products. We also understand that farmed fish has an important role for the future; however, aquaculture must grow in a responsible manner.

We already worked with producers who were leading in terms of high-quality production processes. In our conditions for suppliers, we incorporated many aspects which are also present in the ASC standards.

Before ASC introduced the tilapia standards, we saw the emergence of own sustainability labels in the market. However, we did not embark on this route, we deliberately opted for the transparent, multi-stakeholder model of ASC.

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What are the benefits of ASC certification? Sustainability is a priority for Queens. For many years, we have worked with reputable suppliers, specifically selected by us on the basis of, among other things, sustainability.

With the logo on the packaging, ASC recognises that our products were farmed responsibly and rewards us for this. This offers clarity for our suppliers and the customers in the shop: they receive confirmation that they are purchasing a responsibly produced product.

Pangasius is the leading fish product in the Netherlands and partially thanks to ASC certification our market is still growing. In addition, the ASC certification benefits our reputation in the market. Market players now proactively approach us.
What are your plans for the future? For the future, we are mainly looking at farmed shrimp and salmon. At present, we have more or less deliberately decided to not include shrimp in our product range. But ASC certification may change that. In terms of salmon, we currently use MSC certified wild salmon but ASC certification offers good prospects to widen our range of certified responsibly farmed products.

We have made great progress in creating the conditions to ensure a range of responsible products. This means sustainability has become entrenched in our approach. The consumer no longer needs to worry about how responsible a product is.

Our main task now is to help consumers who are unfamiliar with fish understand that it is tasty, healthy and easy. We do not need to mention its sustainability. Through ASC certification, Queens has taken care of that concern.

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What would you say to someone who is considering ASC certification? If you and your supplier decide to move towards ASC certification then you must do so with conviction and realise that it takes time and money and involves convincing your suppliers. It must be something that you are really committed to and believe in.

It means a commitment between you and your supplier: becoming partners. You need to convince the farm of the importance of responsible farming methods and must also be willing to pay a fair price for that.

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Applying for ASC chain-of-custody certification?
We were already MSC certified so the process of obtaining ASC chain-of-custody certification was relatively easy. In addition, our customers do not have the choice between ASC or non-ASC certified products; so the process is much clearer. As a result, there was no need for us to implement any additional measures.

However, the process is a bit more involved for the farms that supply to us. They were obviously not familiar with the MSC chain-of-custody certification. Affiliation with the GLOBALG.A.P. certification would definitely make things easier for them. From what I gather, this may be the case in the future.