ASC Case Study: Seafood Connection

Dutch company Seafood Connection is a leading supplier of responsibly farmed, ASC certified pangasius and tilapia to the European market. Quality Assurance Manager Klaas-Jan Mazereeuw and Sales Director Retail Klaas-Hessel van Eerde explain how they became involved in the ASC programme and what it has brought to Seafood Connection.

Company profile  Seafood Connection was established in 1995 as an importer of frozen fish products. Nowadays, the company is a major player in supplying wholesalers, retailers and foodservices across Europe. And, it turns over 25,000 tonnes of fish fillets and shrimps a year. Characteristic of Seafood Connection is its direct sourcing approach, with control over the entire process from catching or farming and processing to transport and storage. ASC certified pangasius and tilapia hold a prominent position in the company’s comprehensive product range. Seafood Connection is part of the Japanese seafood company Maruha Nichiro since 2013.

Why did you choose ASC?  We started our own sustainability programme, Blue Planet, in 2004. We were one of the first importers that created a standard for good farming practice; at the time, an independent programme was not available. With the help of experts, we developed criteria for (waste) water management, use of antibiotics, density in the cages etc.

Back then, the demand of the international retail sector for responsibly farmed fish was not yet prominent. A couple of years later, the international retail sector demanded compliance with the standard of GLOBALG.A.P., so we shifted to this. Not long after that, the demand for a consumer label became urgent and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) was introduced.

For us, there was no doubt as to our involvement: from the start, it was clear that ASC would become the standard for responsible farming.

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Klaas-Jan Mazereeuw

We were convinced that ASC would have an impact. And this has proven to be the case in the last year, especially in the Netherlands. Pangasius is a major product in the Netherlands and the Dutch retail sector is one of the front-runners when it comes to making its range of fish products more sustainable.

In the future, following the availability of ASC certified salmon and shrimp, the significance of ASC will only increase.

What are the benefits of ASC certification?  The European retail sector and foodservices that we supply have
Renowned partners collaborate to help pangasius producers work towards ASC certification.

set sustainability targets for themselves. For example, from a certain date all fish must come from certified, sustainable sources. The programmes of MSC and ASC are now used as the standard by the international retail sector and foodservices. This creates clarity for us and our suppliers. They are the standards that we now adhere to. ASC is the license to produce.

"The ASC certification benefits our reputation in the market. Market players now proactively approach us."

Klaas-Jan Mazereeuw

We are already noticing that it is also good for our market position. Just prior to ASC certification being introduced, the market for pangasius in the Netherlands was somewhat under pressure. However, it has stabilised following the introduction of ASC certified products. So definitely beneficial.

What are your plans for the future? We very much look forward to the availability of ASC certified salmon and shrimp. We definitely want to work on getting these products to the market. We are already consulting with our salmon suppliers in Norway and Chile about becoming involved in the ASC programme. And we are confident about the outcome of this process. The same applies to shrimp, although that situation is more complicated. The international market for shrimp is demand-driven, which means shrimp producers have no problem selling their product. So we have to work harder to convince them of the added value of ASC certification. But we are confident about this process as well.

What would you say to someone who is considering ASC certification? Getting your suppliers engaged in the ASC certification process is not an easy task. You have to convince your suppliers of the benefits. In that respect, it is very important to properly understand the other party’s situation and realize that you have to do this together. You have to be committed.

For the ASC certification of pangasius, we participated in the ASC Accelerator programme; in the beginning, we also encountered some resistance from our suppliers. That’s just part of it and you should not be discouraged by this.

The result is fantastic, the Vietnamese pangasius breeders’ achievements are tremendous considering how much of the production is now ASC certified.

What was your experience of the application process for ASC chain-of-custody certification? Becoming ASC chain-of-custody certified is more or less a formality for companies who are already MSC chain-of-custody certified.

It is very good that ASC and MSC work together on this. That really makes it a cost-effective operation.