

COMMENTARY

IS CERTIFICATION COMING TO A FARM NEAR YOU?

BY BRIAN KINGZETT
& MELISSA STRUTHERS

By now, many of us, when faced with a store shelf of canned tuna instinctively choose the tin with a "dolphin safe" certification logo. Most consumers may not know exactly what the "dolphin safe" means how it relates to fishing practices or that there is a variety of programs and marks (including the *Flipper Seal of Approval*). For most consumers, the choice is determined by the insinuation that the tin without a logo must then somehow be "unsafe." While in the supermarket aisle, just go ahead and try to explain to your young daughter that you are willing to condone killing dolphins to save a quarter.

Consumers, whether reactive or pro-active, drive the ever-increasing trend among food stuffs to demonstrate that they are achieving high standards in terms of environment, sustainability, and food safety. Simply put, this determines whether your product or your competitors makes it to the check-out.

Retailers are in control

The retailer decides what makes it to the shelf in the first place and has the final power in this consumer relationship. Add food safety liability, consumer ignorance and confusion about seafood, seafood watch programs and an anti-aquaculture lobby willing to fuel consumer fears with a liberal approach to the truth, and

suddenly retailers are looking for ways to show they are doing the right thing.

As to the strength of this power, consider Wal-Mart which this spring announced that it was requiring its farmed salmon suppliers to comply with an eco-certification scheme. Wal-Mart is the world's largest retailer at 285.2 billion dollars in sales, which meant in 2002 that 7.5 cents of every US retail dollar was spent in a Wal-Mart. With apologies to the late jazz singer Sarah Vaughn, "Whatever Wal-Mart wants, Wal-Mart gets."

The point is that in the end the market is driving implementation of certification. Certification in itself is a good thing for it allows responsible players who are trying to do the right thing to differentiate themselves from the rest of the pack. Ultimately the market will reward them for it through increased profits or survival in a competitive market.

In the aquaculture industry, *Responsible Aquaculture Certification or Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) programs* allow producers, processors, buyers and importers to respond to these consumer pressures. Third party programs guarantee that strict standards are met and maintained using independent verification and they confer more

Ultimately certified seafood will become the norm, not the exception

— Howard Johnson, Seafood Market Analyst



trust in the marketplace. Typically these programs bring together On-Farm Food Safety, Environmental Codes of Practice, Traceability and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP's) into one neat package.



Schemes, schemes, everywhere a scheme

To see how certification schemes may play out in the Canadian industry, it is worthwhile to look at what is happening to the global shrimp industry which has been under fire for a range of issues. At

an FAO workshop held during the Bali 2005 World Aquaculture Society meetings, a variety of new programmes for the shrimp industry were discussed including: Global Aquaculture Alliance Responsible Aquaculture Program (Aquaculture Certification Council), Safe Quality Food (SQF) Shrimp program, Organically Certified Shrimp, Fair Trade Shrimp, EurepGap (European retail) and British Retail Consortium, Bangladesh Shrimp Seal of Quality, Thai Quality Shrimp programme, World Wildlife fund and Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF).

What is yet unclear, is whether schemes will to begin competing with each other and how the retail industry will react to possible consumer and retailer confusion on which certification is best.

Aquaculture Certification Council

Arguably, the furthest along is the three year old Aquaculture Certification Council. The ACC is a US non-profit, non-member NGO established to certify social, environmental and food safety standards at aquaculture facilities throughout the world. It counts the Darden Restaurant Group among its founders.

The ACC delivers a certification system that applies elements of the Global Aquaculture Alliance *Responsible Aquaculture Program*, combining site inspections, stringent environmental standards, effluent sampling, HACCP sanitary controls, therapeutic controls and traceability. The ACC also examines third world issues of social responsibility such as community issues, wages, living conditions and child

welfare. So far, the ACC is only certifying shrimp farming, but expects to develop standards for other products.

The ACC uses a four star system to individually certify hatcheries, farms and processing plants. Feed mill standards being developed will complete the fourth star. ACC-licensed buyers and certified facilities may use the "Best Aquaculture Practices"

certification mark in advertising and product labelling and provide traceability with ACC's proprietary online traceability system from the hatchery to the buyer.

The ACC operates by training independent certifiers who are accredited by the council to perform site inspections for program participants and forward audit reports to the council for review. The ACC approach favours both small and large farming operations and offers significant flexibility in the range of operations experienced across the third world without compromising its standards.

SQF and CAIA

The SQF (Safe Quality Food) program is a fully integrated food safety and quality management protocol designed specifically for the food industry with application at all links in the food supply chain. Developed in Australia, it was acquired in 2003 by The Food Marketing Institute, a non-profit, NGO consisting of food retailers and wholesalers worldwide. Operating from the SQF Institute hosted by FMI in Washington, DC, the program conforms to the highest international standards and utilizes protocols recognized by the International Accreditation Forum.



CANADIAN AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY ALLIANCE
ALLIANCE DE L'INDUSTRIE CANADIENNE DE L'AQUICULTURE

Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance (CAIA) announces the renewal of its Career Focus Program (Internship Program) for the eight consecutive year, effective August 2005

This program is a joint CAIA and Human Resource Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) sponsored initiative designed to provide recent graduates the opportunity to gain their first critical work experience in the field of aquaculture and to foster long term employability in the industry.

Program Mission: Hire a new or recent post-secondary graduate intern from either a college or university level programs in the field of science, technology, business, communications ... for positions in aquaculture, for a minimum of 6 months, to give intern(s) their first job experience.

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New charr farm opens in Quebec

With so much money riding on it, high-level representatives of federal, provincial and local government agencies turned out in force for the grand opening of the new \$2.5-million AquaCulture Nordik Arctic charr and brook trout fish farm in Quebec a few weeks ago.

Officials present included Federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Andy Scott, Nathalie Normandeau as Minister for the Gaspésie-Isles-de-la-madeleine region, Quebec Minister for Native Affairs Geoffrey Kelley, and senior members of the Malecites of Viger Band Council.

The result of a partnership between the Malecites First Nation and co-owners Dominic McInnis and his sister Valerie, the company was preparing to put fish into the 80-by-150-foot greenhouse-style hatchery and



Opening day at the AquaCulture Nordik Arctic charr farm in Chaleur Bay.

growout system.

McInnis said that the company anticipates growing up to about 50 tonnes of Arctic charr and some 10 tonnes of brook trout a year. The first fish were expected to arrive within about a month, after the first staff were hired.

McInnis said the program will likely have about two or three permanent employees to begin with, but would eventually expand to about 10 people,

including some seasonal personnel.

It will also provide additional work for a nearby processing plant used by the Malecites for their crab and shrimp harvesting programs.

It is being touted as the first fish farm in Quebec to rely exclusively on water-recirculation technology for breeding Arctic charr on a commercial scale.

All-told, said

McInnis, construction of the building had already provided close to \$1 million in spinoff benefits to the local economy in the Chaleur Bay area, with part of the funding coming from money to the Malecites from the federal government under the Marshall Agreement fisheries accord.

McInnis said the process of developing the project was lengthy, especially in view of

the environment-protection requirements from the provincial government.

He said that it will use technology which will recirculate about 95% of the water. They aim to target the export market to the United States and Europe, with some perhaps going to Asia.

Biggest contributors to the project included: the provincial government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Native Affairs Secretariat, with a donation of \$850,000; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada,

with \$650,000; and Agricultural Financial Agency of Quebec, with a loan of \$410,000; followed by a loan of \$250,000 from a regional financial centre.

McInnis said the facility will produce three to four-pound charr, as well as one-pound brook trout for stocking nearby rivers.

He said some training would likely have to be provided to Malecite First Nation members before the company could take them on.

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CERTIFICATION CONTINUED

The SQF Codes are based on HACCP principles and offer the food sector a way to manage food safety, quality and other hazards simultaneously. It consists of two levels of HACCP supplier assurance codes: SQF 1000 (primary producers) and SQF 2000 (food manufacturing and distribution).

The Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance has partnered with SQF at the request of several key retailers and industry members in developing the "SQF Farmed Salmon Certification Program." Very soon, retailers will begin sending letters to their suppliers requesting SQF certified products, (including salmon) and explaining that they will want SQF certified products in their stores within 9-12 months. CAIA does not anticipate that all retailers will initially require the SQF seal, but the number will grow and expand to the food service industry as the benefits of the program become apparent.

Five categories of risks are addressed in the SQF Farmed Salmon Certification Program, including food safety, product quality, environmental stewardship, animal care and worker health and safety. Through use

of HACCP, a series of BAPs have been developed for the production component, and GMPs for the processing component.

Certified product will be able to carry the SQF certification seal, and certified farm and processing companies names will be on a retail list managed by the SQF Institute. To carry the SQF seal on a retail product, it must be produced on a SQF certified farm, and processed at a SQF certified processing facility.

The CAIA National Code System for Responsible Aquaculture meets all SQF requirements and companies that comply with the National Code System standards, or the SQF Farmed Salmon Certification Program will be able to use the *Brand Canada* logo. It is anticipated that a similar SQF program could be easily developed for non-salmonid finfish and shellfish producers given sufficient industry interest.

CAIA is entering the implementation phase of the SQF program. Each company interested in achieving SQF certification must have at least one person trained as a salmon industry "SQF Expert." Additionally, a core group of individuals with industry, SQF and

audit expertise must be developed to perform certifications and agreements negotiated with a SQF certifying bodies.

Brian Kingzett was recently accredited as an independent certifier with the Aquaculture Certification Council and is a Senior Associate with the Blue Revolution Consulting Group Inc., brian@bluerevolution.ca

Melissa Struthers, is the Research and Food Safety Program Coordinator for the Canadian Aquaculture Industry Alliance and has been coordinating the development of the SQF program for CAIA, strutherscaia@aquaculture.ca

New process being tested *continued from page 5*

Devine said the ministry simply refused to even accept or process a similar application from Cold Water in 2000, and that position was supported at appeal in court – without any formal moratorium being in place by the government.

The newness of the process has resulted in some delays according to both Devine and a spokesperson for the environmental consultancy company Cold Water has hired to handle the baseline-data monitoring and consultation aspects of the project, NAR Environmental Consultants.

NAREC senior water resources scientist Jan Lindquist, who worked for the Ontario Ministry of the Environment for 20 years until 1997, said though that she feels progress has been made, and the company has added to the public information and consultation program required under the new protocols, hoping to tackle issues quickly as they are raised.

The company anticipates spending some \$80,000 on the whole approvals process for the new pen sites.

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