



ORGANIC AQUACULTURE: AN ALTERNATIVE?

What is Aquaculture?

Aquaculture is the production of fish and other marine life under controlled conditions. By the year 2000, almost 1/3 of the global seafood supply came from aquaculture. The global rise in aquaculture reflects declining wild fish populations around the world coupled with rising consumer demand for seafood.

The Problems With Aquaculture Today:

- ◇ The use of wild fish for farmed fish feed is a waste of protein resources because it takes about three tons of wild-caught fish and other marine life to produce one ton of carnivorous fish such as salmon. This practice depletes fisheries of small wild oceanic fish.
- ◇ Chemical and antibiotic usage, which is inherent to industrial aquaculture production, and waste dispersal, pollute the surrounding marine environment.
- ◇ Non-native fish can escape and negatively impact the surrounding ecosystem by interbreeding with and therefore weakening the native biodiversity, or by competing for niche habitats.
- ◇ Habitat encroachment impacts the indigenous species of the area by taking up space and polluting habitat.
- ◇ Disease transfer. Diseases can transfer from farmed aquatic animals to wild fish and other marine life.



What is Organic Aquaculture?

Organic aquaculture is an attempt to mitigate some of the aforementioned problems with industrial aquaculture. Organic aquaculture practices would entail raising seafood in a humane manner that is sustainable and does not pollute the environment. It also seeks to raise marine creatures in conditions that are as similar to their wild counterparts as possible.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is working on drafting organic aquaculture standards. The specific standards the USDA chooses will determine whether or not organic aquaculture will become a viable alternative to the environmentally degrading practices of industrial aquaculture.

Organic Labeling Issues to Be Aware of:

1. You may run across seafood that is labeled as “organic” (as opposed to “USDA Certified Organic”) but because there are no set guidelines for organic aquaculture, there is no way of knowing whether the label actually represents seafood that is in any way different from conventional seafood.
2. In April 2003, Senator Stevens of Alaska attached a rider to the Leahy-Snowe Organic Restoration Act that requires the National Organic Standards Board to allow the labeling of wild fish as organic (The Organic Restoration Act repealed a previous bill that had weakened the organic feed requirements for chickens labeled as organic.)



Organic Aquaculture, Continued...

CFS Believes That:

- ◇ **Organic aquaculture should have its own specific standards rather than using the organic standards drafted for land-raised livestock such as cattle, pork, and poultry.** Aquatic ecosystems are inherently different than land ecosystems and must be given individual attention rather than lumping them into the same category.
- ◇ **Wild-caught aquatic animals cannot be certified as organic.** There are some groups that want organic aquaculture to include wild-caught fish. There is no way of certifying wild-caught fish as organic because in addition to a myriad of potential health and environmental issues, it is impossible to trace the feed source of wild-caught fish.
- ◇ **Carnivorous fish cannot be farmed organically** Preexisting organic standards require animals to be raised as close to natural conditions as possible; it would never be feasible to farm carnivorous fish such as salmon in a density similar to their wild habitat. There are over 220 different species of fish used in aquaculture, including many bottom-feeding, low-food chain alternatives to carnivores.
- ◇ **Organic aquaculture should be land-based** In order to prevent aquacultural waste and effluent from contaminating oceans and fresh water sources, organic aquaculture farms should be kept in closed recirculating systems and their waste remediated in an environmentally responsible manner. Ocean and waterway based aquaculture poses serious risks because of the likelihood of farmed fish escaping into the wild, spreading new diseases to wild aquatic creatures, and diluting or altering native marine populations through competition and interbreeding.

The USDA needs to draft specific organic standards for aquaculture before fish and other seafood can be labeled as USDA certified organic.

Useful Links:

For more info on organic aquaculture:

www.fw.umn.edu/isees/OrganicAquaculture/orgaqua.htm

For more info on sustainable aquaculture:

www.seaweb.org/resources/sac/sustainable.shtml

For more info on other countries that already have organic aquaculture standards:

www.fao.org/DOCREP/005/Y4137E/y4137e06.htm

For more information about organic aquaculture produced around the globe:

www.globefish.org/index.php?id=2149&easysitestatid=2119446581

FAO: *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (2002), available at: fao.org/docrep/005/y7300e/y7300e04.htm#P1204_5310



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