



BLUE FARMING IN THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

A NEW STRATEGIC VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE AQUACULTURE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

WHY IS AQUACULTURE IMPORTANT FOR YOU?

Did you know that more than half of the world's fish and other aquatic food for human consumption comes from aquaculture? In fact, the farming of fish and shellfish (aquaculture) has been the fastest growing food production activity in the world in recent decades. This growth is expected to continue.

What are the benefits of aquaculture?

When done in a sustainable way, aquaculture can help solve some of the most pressing issues we face today.

- It delivers nutritious and diverse food to a growing world population.
- It reduces the need to catch more wild fish to meet the increasing demand for fish and therefore contributes to preserving fish stocks.
- It provides food that is fresh and local.
- It produces food and feed with a lower climate and environmental impact than other types of farming.
- It creates much-needed jobs in coastal and rural communities, including the most remote.
- Certain types of aquaculture contribute to the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.



Fish, shellfish and algae, besides being good sources of protein, also provide a variety of other nutrients, including micronutrients such as vitamin D and B vitamins, selenium, iodine, zinc, iron and potassium. In particular, the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids found in them have important beneficial effects on human health and can help prevent disease.



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AQUACULTURE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Despite all of its benefits, aquaculture production and consumption in the European Union (EU) has not grown at the same pace as in other parts of the world. Of the total consumption of fish and seafood by the average EU citizen, only 25% originated from aquaculture in 2018. EU aquaculture production in particular only covered 10% of the seafood consumed in the EU and accounted for less than 2% of world production.

Almost 70% of aquaculture production in the EU is concentrated in four Member States (Spain, France, Italy and Greece). In terms of volume of aquaculture production per category of species, more than half is shellfish, while marine fish and freshwater fish each account for around 20% of the total volume. The vast majority of EU production is for mussels, trout, seabream, oysters, seabass, carp and clams.

This means that there is still a lot of potential for further growth and diversification in terms of producing countries and species farmed. Aquaculture can also provide consumers in the EU with even more diverse healthy and sustainable food products, including those more widely consumed in other regions of the world, for example algae or invertebrates such as sea urchins.



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It is estimated that there are 15 000 companies in the aquaculture sector in the EU, the large majority of which are microenterprises employing fewer than 10 people. The total number of people employed in aquaculture is close to 70 000 (2018 figures). These microenterprises tend to be family owned and use rather extensive production methods and systems.

The EU is highly dependent on imported aquatic food. The EU imports over 70% of the fish and seafood that it consumes. It is therefore important to support the further growth and diversification of aquaculture production in the EU in a way that preserves the environment and provides more jobs and economic development to coastal and rural areas.

HOW IS AQUACULTURE BEING DEVELOPED IN THE EU?

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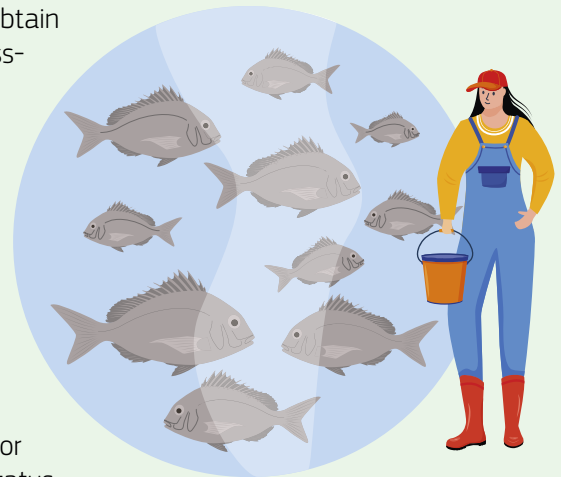
As early as 2013, the **EU and its Member States set the objective to develop aquaculture in the European Union in a way that ensures its economic, social and environmental sustainability.** Aquaculture is a complex activity that involves many elements, such as the use of space and water, taking care of the health and welfare of animals farmed and ensuring the safety of products used in the farming process (such as feed or veterinary treatments) for the environment and for human health. There is a large body of EU legislation covering these issues, with which aquaculture producers have to comply. In addition, specific legislation for organic production promotes, through certification and labelling, aquaculture that complies with stricter production requirements in terms of environmental impact and animal welfare, as well as limited and regulated use of inputs.

© Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization (HAPO)



WHICH RULES DO AQUACULTURE PRODUCERS IN THE EU NEED TO FOLLOW BEFORE THEIR PRODUCTS REACH YOUR PLATE?

- ✔ Before aquaculture farms can operate, aquaculture producers must obtain authorisation from the competent national authorities. In their assessment, the authorities check if the location proposed is suitable and carefully verify the potential impact of the farm on the environment. Authorised farms must continue to monitor their impact on the environment.
- ✔ To protect consumers' health, aquaculture farmers must follow strict rules on food hygiene and animal health. They must only use authorised and controlled feed.
- ✔ To protect the environment, producers may only use authorised feed, cleaning products and medicines.
- ✔ Aquaculture producers need authorisation before using seawater or fresh water for the farm. When they return it to the environment, the status of the water body must not deteriorate.
- ✔ In addition, aquaculture farmers have obligations concerning animal health. Their establishments must be registered or approved by sanitary authorities dealing with animal health, and both the farmer and these authorities have an obligation to carry out surveillance for possible diseases. Farmers also have the obligation to keep several records, including those concerning how many animals enter and leave the farm and how many die. They must also record the measures they take to prevent and manage any risk of disease.
- ✔ In addition, farmers must ensure humane treatment of farmed animals throughout their production cycle and during slaughtering and transport.
- ✔ The use of veterinary medicines requires a prescription from a veterinarian, and only authorised veterinary medicines are permitted, respecting prescribed withdrawal periods and residue limits. Farmers must record all the veterinary medicines they use and keep a copy of the prescriptions.



The main responsibility for ensuring the application of these rules and the management of aquaculture activities lies with public authorities in the different EU Member States. Member State experts and the European Commission also cooperate, with input from the aquaculture sector and other interested parties such as NGOs. Together, they ensure that aquaculture can grow in a way that brings benefits to producers, communities and consumers, while also preserving the natural environment it relies on. This cooperation is based on strategic guidelines from the European Commission and national strategic plans for the sector.



A NEW VISION FOR THE EU AQUACULTURE SECTOR

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The European Green Deal is the EU's new growth agenda. Its objective is to stimulate the economy and create jobs while accelerating the green transition. In this context, it is more important than ever to ensure that aquaculture in the EU grows in a way that also contributes to important objectives such as reducing of carbon emissions, transitioning to more sustainable food systems, reversing the loss of biodiversity, reducing pollution and creating jobs in coastal and rural communities.

This is why the European Commission has adopted in 2021 new strategic guidelines for the development of this sector in the EU. They set the path for EU aquaculture to grow into an even more competitive and resilient sector and to become a global reference for sustainability by 2030. The Commission involved

EU Member States, the aquaculture sector and other interested groups and citizens in the preparation of these guidelines.

The strategic guidelines cover all issues that are relevant for the sustainable development of aquaculture in the EU and provide concrete recommendations to the Commission, Member States, aquaculture producers and other relevant actors, such as NGOs. Those recommendations include the development of guidance and good practices on different aspects of aquaculture activities.

Achieving the objectives of the strategic guidelines **depends on all of us**: EU and Member State authorities, aquaculture producers, non-governmental organisations, investors, processors, retailers and consumers.



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THE ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE NEW GUIDELINES INCLUDE:

- ✓ facilitating access to space and water, so EU aquaculture can keep growing
- ✓ reducing unnecessary administrative burden for authorising new aquaculture farms
- ✓ further limiting the impact of aquaculture, as well as promoting the types of aquaculture that are most beneficial for the environment and the climate
- ✓ improving measures regarding animal health and welfare
- ✓ ensuring that aquaculture adapts to climate change and contributes to the mitigation of climate change impact
- ✓ providing more and better information to consumers and citizens on EU aquaculture
- ✓ promoting research and innovation and the development of relevant skills
- ✓ promoting diversification of production to increase the offer of aquaculture products, notably of new promising species in the EU such as algae or marine invertebrates (including molluscs or other invertebrates such as sea urchins or sea cucumbers)

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