

King's Seafood Company shares the viewpoint held by the National Marine Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. An editorial by the agency's director is below, from the September 2007 issue of Seafood Business magazine.



Offshore aquaculture fills the supply gap - September 2007

By William T. Hogarth, Ph.D.

When it comes to seafood production, the United States is at a crossroads. Study after study confirms the health benefits of eating seafood, and consumers in America and abroad have gotten the message. Meanwhile, wild catch levels worldwide have remained relatively stable over the last 20 years. Because wild harvests can no longer keep up with growing demand, increases in the seafood supply will come from aquaculture.

We've done a good job managing America's marine resources, but even the best-managed wild fisheries can't meet the growing demand for seafood. Aquaculture must fill the gap — the only question is, where will it come from?

Aquaculture is a \$70 billion annual enterprise worldwide; almost half of the seafood consumed is farmed. However, U.S. aquaculture accounts for just 1.5 percent of the global aquaculture production. Experts say we'll need another 40 million tons of seafood annually by 2030 to meet current consumption rates.

In this large and growing market, the United States remains a net importer of seafood — more than 80 percent of the seafood consumed in the United States is imported, of which 40 percent is farmed. Marine aquaculture therefore presents tremendous opportunities for the United States.

Enactment of the National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007 will allow the United States to become more self-sufficient in the production of healthy seafood by growing more at home.

By laying the foundation for aquaculture expansion, the bill will help create jobs in coastal communities and help reduce our \$8 billion seafood trade deficit. The United States must develop aquaculture as a complement to commercial fishing or it will be forced to import increasing amounts of farm-raised seafood.

Food safety is another issue. U.S. consumers want to know that their seafood was produced in a safe and sustainable way, and many turn to local products when given a choice. Producing seafood locally allows us to test and develop new technologies, equipment and alternative feeds. This makes us more competitive in the global market and allows us to lead by example — our sustainable production will encourage our trading partners to adopt best management practices, thereby improving the quality of all seafood reaching U.S. consumers.

For some time, many coastal communities have suffered from overcapitalization and limited harvests in the commercial fishing industry. With a robust domestic aquaculture industry, fishing boats could also service aquaculture operations and seafood-industry infrastructure could process and distribute both cultured and wild seafood products.

Domestic aquaculture could provide a steady source of product and, in some locations, prevent processing facilities from closing down due to insufficient wild harvests.

Preliminary production estimates indicate that domestic aquaculture production of all species (both marine and freshwater) could increase from about 500,000 tons today to more than 1.5 million tons per year by 2025. The additional production could include 760,000 tons of seafood from finfish aquaculture and 245,000 tons from mollusk production.

In addition to creating new job opportunities at hatcheries and grow-out facilities, environmentally sound aquaculture expansion will have a ripple effect on other aspects of the economy since aquaculture relies on other producers and manufacturers for goods and services, including soybean and grain producers; equipment and technology providers; cold storage, transport, marketing and foodservice providers; and veterinarians. In turn, these activities will strengthen the coastal communities in which the businesses operate and provide healthy seafood to consumers.

Successes to date of aquaculture-related businesses demonstrate direct economic benefits from an increase in domestic aquaculture production, including offshore aquaculture. More and more communities and fishermen are recognizing that environmentally sound aquaculture can present development opportunities for areas hit hard by job losses, natural disasters and other challenges. As interest grows, these communities are beginning to integrate aquaculture into their economies. Stock enhancement of commercial and recreational fisheries adds to the economic benefits accruing from U.S. investment in marine aquaculture.

The bill strikes the proper balance between aquaculture development and environmental protection and will allow for timely permit decisions and adaptive management approaches. It also includes provisions for R&D to support all types of marine aquaculture, not just off-shore technologies.

Marine aquaculture has the potential to contribute greatly to our seafood supply and to the economy. But this potential will be realized only if we can provide the regulatory certainty for businesses to make sound investment decisions. The National Offshore Aquaculture Act of 2007 will give NOAA the authority it needs to provide that regulatory certainty.

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