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Organic aquaculture hits bumps

THE U.S. Department of Agriculture's advisory National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) and the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) will be taking another step toward the development of national organic aquaculture standards when they meet for the Organic Aquaculture Symposium in November.

The two critical topics on the agenda are fish meal and oil in aquafeeds and open cage net pens. A six-member panel has been selected for each of these topics, comprising stakeholders from within aquaculture and the environmental movement.

The difficulty of the task facing NOSB and NOP should not be underestimated. While the global organic community is generally supportive of the development of organic standards for aquaculture and accepts sustainably produced fish meal and oil within their standards, in the U.S., the topic is something of a hot potato.

There is considerable political pressure against organic aquaculture standards from well-funded, environmental non-governmental organizations that are the constituents of NOP.

Many of these loud voices have made their positions very clear against the development of aquaculture in general and organic aquaculture in particular. Among the loudest has been the Pure Salmon Campaign, part of the National Environmental Trust.

Pure Salmon Campaign director Andrea Kavanagh is one of the panelists addressing the issue of open cage net pens. She will present a paper entitled "A review of research on the causes and quantities of farmed fish escapes from open net cage systems and a literature review of the impact of escapes on wild fish populations, using farmed salmon as case study." The authors cited are Kavanagh, Rachel Hopkins and Don Staniford.

Remember Don Staniford? He used to work for Friends of Clayoquot Sound, a Pure Salmon Campaign partner. When he issued defamatory press releases against

Aquaculture

with
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Creative Salmon, a Tofino, B.C.-based salmon farm, the company called him out and took him to court.

In January, the British Columbia Supreme Court concluded that Staniford's statements were motivated by malice because he was attempting to build opposition to Creative Salmon's objective of obtaining organic certification for its fish.

The judge also said Staniford used intentionally inflammatory words and withheld facts in order to increase opposition to salmon farming.

While the tactics and agenda of some environmentalists must be deplored, it would be a mistake to dismiss all of their claims out of hand. Just as the shenanigans of groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals blurred the line between animal rights and animal welfare concerns, extreme environmentalism also has the potential to discredit legitimate environmental impact issues.

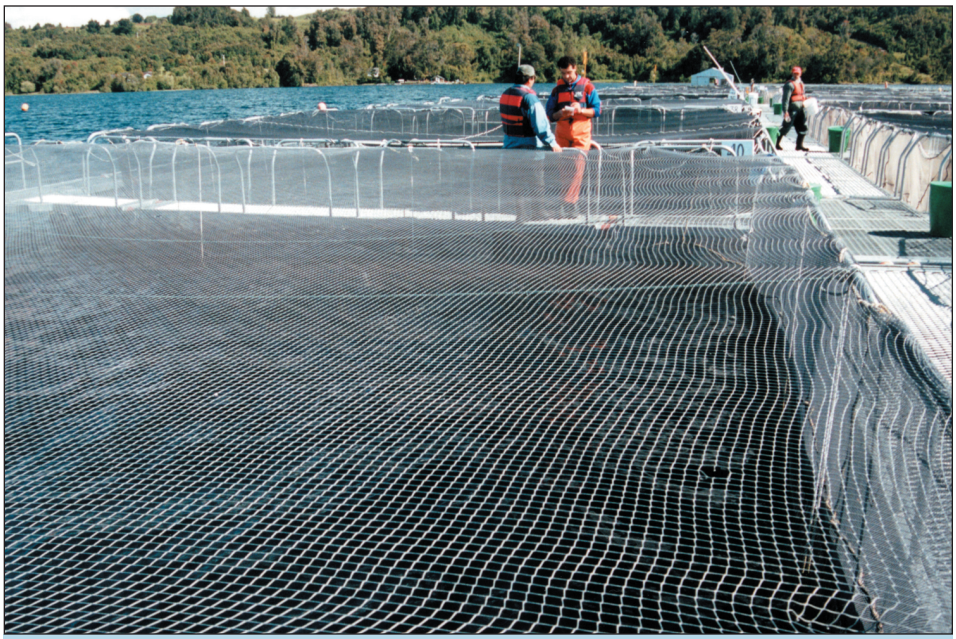
The issues are there, but with the political will and common sense, it should not be an impossible task for the U.S. to do what so many other countries have done in creating an organic label for aquaculture.

Collaborative research

The aquafeed industry has for many years recognized that viable utilization of plant feedstuffs formulated in aquafeeds for the production of aquatic species is an essential requirement for the future development of aquaculture.

Such plant feedstuffs must provide cost-effective diets that will grow aquatic species with minimal environmental impact and result in a product that is appealing and nutritious.

Despite considerable research efforts,some factors limit the amount of



ON THE AGENDA: At the Organic Aquaculture Symposium in November, two topics on the agenda will be fish meal and oil in aquafeeds and open cage net pens like the one shown here.

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plant protein that can be used in diets of carnivorous species, including most marine species, of present and potential commercial importance.

The Plant Products in Aquafeed (PPA) Working Group is an informal association of international experts who have developed a roadmap of the research needed to optimize the use of renewable and sustainable plant feedstocks in diets of cultured marine carnivorous fish.

The PPA Strategic Plan describes seven goals with objectives and performance measures:

1. Establish standardized research approaches and protocols for systematic evaluation of plant feedstuffs across carnivorous fish species;

2. Enhance fish germplasm, and discover genes;

3. Enhance the inherent composition of crops to provide a beneficial balance of bioactive compounds in order to optimize their use in aquafeeds for carnivorous fish;

4. Increase understanding of interactions between gastrointestinal microflora and plant tolerance in fish;

5. Improve and optimize ingredient processing, feed manufacturing technology and feed formulations to increase inclusion of plant-derived ingredients in carnivorous fish diets;

6. Optimize the storage, nutritional and sensory quality of aquaculture species for human consumption, and

7. Develop an international communications network for research on optimizing plant products in aquafeed.

Any researcher from the public or private sectors with an expertise relevant to the research described in the PPA Strategic Plan is welcome to participate in the PPA Working Group as it works toward its implementation.

To be added to the PPA mailing list, contact Diane Bellis of AgSource Inc. at dbellis@agsourceinc.com. For more information, PPA has now established a web presence with its own section on Aquafeed.com.