




Ecuador says industry must do more for farmed shrimp's reputation

Country's aquaculture association calls on shrimp producing nations to promote product as a safe, sustainable food source for consumers.

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Due to a lack of information and suitable education on the part of the industry, many consumers still frown on the aquaculture sector, and shrimp producers in particular need to take action, according to Jose Antonio Camposano, executive president of Ecuador's CNA.

Camposano is on a mission to change the image of aquaculture in the consumer's mind as a whole, as well as the shrimp sector in particular.

"The whole image of aquaculture is wrong," Camposano told **IntraFish**.

Many consumer base their opinion on what is happening in Asia – where the majority of shrimp is farmed and most of the case studies on shrimp aquaculture come from.

In terms of shrimp production in 2014, around 3 million metric tons was produced in Asia, from countries including China, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and India.

In contrast, around 609,000 metric tons was produced in Latin American, Camposano said.

Of this, the vast majority comes from Ecuador, with around 277,166 metric tons.

Peoples' fears around the use of antibiotics are predominantly based on experience with certain countries, but its important to state a difference between the ones with sustainable practices and the ones that still have not make that "upgrade," said Camposano.

There are different production systems and parts of the world doing things differently, he said.

"There is so much information on Asia aquaculture production, but people need to take a deeper look into what is happening in Latin America for

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example," he said. "Ecuador represents 45-50 percent of Latin American production, so it's a story worth telling."

Consumers need to understand that there are multiple ways of producing shrimp, Camposano said.

"We must encourage consumers to look for exceptions; countries committed with sustainable aquaculture, where one can find excellent products that not only comply with sanitary regulations but ones that support environmental and social responsibility practices," he told **IntraFish**.

Looking for certifications should be the second level, said Camposano.

"You can't talk about certifications to a consumer if that production system is not sustainable," he said.

"It is complex but consumers must understand there are several ways of farming shrimp. Some need to improve or, in some cases, change their practices, but there are also superb examples of sustainable ways of farming."

Nevertheless it is easy to find differences in the structure of Asian aquaculture countries and Latin American countries like Ecuador.

While there are "hundreds of thousands of small-time producers" in Asia, it is different in Ecuador.

There are around 3,000 shrimp farms in Ecuador, which are easier to control and organize from a private and a governmental point of view.

"When you have all integrated groups -- such as Santa Priscilla, Songa and Omarsa -- these can lead by example, and it is one of the strengths of the industry," said Camposano.

In terms of information, in Ecuador there is also more of a flux of information between the whole chain of production from the hatcheries, the feed companies, producers and exporters.

"So for example when we are looking at production costs, we are able to get a broader image of the situation," he said.

But Camposano wants the global industry to work together to prove to consumers that aquaculture is a sustainable food source and to position shrimp aquaculture as a safe, antibiotic-free shrimp source.

The connection with a customer is achieved not only through the product, but through the industry and company behavior, he said.

"The main challenge is that there is new type of consumer, this approach is not achieved through product only -- it is more down to how the industry and individual companies behave," Camposano said. "Also how the country behaves in terms of labor and environmental regulations.

"We need to make the products worth buying."

Additionally, growing businesses or industries are usually targeted as "bad business" if there is no communication effort to change that trend.

Growing industries need to be well positioned in order to improve their relationship and communication with several players, including government, international regulatory agencies, clients and public opinion.

"I think we should change the approach and raise the concept of aquaculture first," said Camposano.

Citing the recent lawsuit against Costco, he said there needs to be a better response from industry in combating accusations.

Additionally, Camposano is frustrated that so many consumers perceive wild-caught seafood to be more sustainable.

"We must convince them to look into the reputation of farm raised products, and increase awareness that aquaculture is much better than before, we have fixed errors that needed fixing," he told **IntraFish**.

"Some systems may be better than others but it doesn't mean you can't find a good example."

