Learn Blue: Improving Animal Welfare in Aquaculture'

Overview:

With the rising global demand for protein, aquaculture has become the dominant provider of sustainable seafood. Just as in terrestrial farming, sustainable aquaculture depends on maintaining the health and welfare of aquatic animals. Animal welfare in aquaculture is important for ethical, environmental, and economic reasons.

This workshop explained how animal welfare in aquaculture can increase sustainability and productivity, and drive investments. The session highlighted practical tools and resources available for different stakeholders to contribute to the implementation, monitoring, and assessment of animal welfare in aquaculture across the food supply chain.

Experts from FAI, a UK-based consultancy firm, presented their framework for animal welfare, encompassing nutrition, physical environment, health, and behavior. This framework is used to educate and empower entrepreneurs and managers across the world to improve welfare and achieve better production outcomes in diverse aquatic species including tilapia, shrimp, and carp. The audience also heard about different welfare journeys, challenges, and opportunities by companies from a wide range of geographies represented by Brazil, Thailand, Honduras and Egypt. More than 200 participants were able to hear first-hand about the limitations, opportunities and benefits of applying animal welfare standards in a wide range of aquaculture production systems and aquatic commodities, including fish and crustaceans.

The workshop was organized in the framework of the Global ASA Integrating Aquaculture into Land and Seascapes, supported by PROBLUE. The ASA promotes the integration of sustainable and responsible aquaculture into development programs and actions, including World Bank operations.

Key Takeaways:

- Considering the essential role of the aquaculture sector in job creation, economic development, improved nutrition and food security, the World Bank is placing special emphasis on the integration of strategic aquaculture activities into its current and future operations. Within the framework of the Integrating Aquaculture into Land and Seascape ASA, responsible production standards are a fundamental aspect, including the design, implementation and monitoring of economic, social, environmental and productive criteria and indicators.The development and inclusion of animal welfare standards in aquaculture activities is therefore a priority for the Bank. Ensuring adequate animal welfare in aquaculture production systems is a relatively new technical aspect that must be

adequately defined, explained and justified to stakeholders along the entire value chain. Animal welfare standards ensure a win-win-win situation: for the producer (animals with better welfare are healthier and more productive), for the production animal itself (ensuring that their farming conditions are optimal), and for the consumer (having a better-quality product on the table).

- During the training it was emphasized the importance of including fish welfare considerations into World Bank impact assessments and standards, ensuring that fish welfare considerations are embedded in Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA), while promoting the inclusion of fish welfare indicators into World Bank's Environmental and Social Standards.
- Participants and FAI experts noted that World Bank projects and operations should promote best aquaculture practices that prioritize water quality, environmental monitoring, stocking density, humane handling, and disease management, establishing clear fish welfare indicators in project performance monitoring and evaluation.
- Furthermore, World Bank actions focused on improved fisheries and aquaculture governance should encourage partner governments to adopt fish welfare standards in national aquaculture and fisheries policies.
- It was emphasized the need for the World Bank, its clients and private sector stakeholders to invest in training programs for fish farmers, fisheries/aquaculture managers, and policymakers on humane fish handling, and enhance collaboration with NGOs, research institutions, and private sector partners to advance innovation in fish welfare.
- FAI experts advised the World Bank to utilize data-driven monitoring and evaluation systems to assess fish health and welfare in current and future operations, and support research on climate resilience in farmed stocks, including the impacts of water temperature changes, water acidification and pollution.
- Fabian Reush, Managing Director and Founder of Hydroneo in Thailand talked about 'Water Monitoring and Automation and Technological perspectives' in the country, with special emphasis on the benefits to SMEs. He stressed the importance of digitalized environmental monitoring to assure fish welfare status, reduce production losses, and achieve optimized performance in shrimp farming.
- Shannon Robers, Aquaculture and Fisheries Biologist, SeaFresh group presented the topic 'Shrimp Supply Chain: SeaFresh Group operating in Honduras and Thailand'. Shannon shared the benefits of compliance with fish welfare standards to access new markets and improve consumer perception while improving production performance and reducing farming risks.
- Ahmad Hamza, CEO, Aquavet Egypt, presented the topic 'Egypt: Experiences from Veterinary Consultancy for Tilapia in Egypt'. Ahmad explained the strong

interconnection between fish health and welfare in small farming systems, where small management improvements can lead to big achievements in terms of efficiency and resource use optimization.

- Henrique Junqueira, Executive Director, BTJ AQUA, presented the topic 'Tilapia Production and Processing: BTJ AQUA in Brazil'. He stressed that although compliance and monitoring of fish welfare standards are not broadly applied in small and medium scale farmers in Brazil, farmers are starting to realize the positive impact of improving fish wellbeing in all types of farming systems. Fish wellbeing is starting to be seen as the approach to enhance fish health, decrease mortality and morbidity in all production stages, improve productive performance, and provide a better product to consumers.

You can access the recording here.