

Setting welfare standards in aquaculture

Albert Schweitzer Foundation (ASF) was able to launch a project with a large German retailer to set welfare standards for trout aquaculture. While this project is ongoing, ASF wants to build on the momentum to drive change in the entire German retail and aquaculture sector and to influence producers internationally.

ASF sees the chance to work with all stakeholders and to greatly reduce resistance to change in the aquaculture sector. The main line of argument for German and similar producers is that setting fish welfare and quality standards (with a focus on welfare) is one of the best ways to defend market share against producers from countries that have close to no regulation and therefore can produce fish very cheaply under terrible conditions. The main line of argument for producers from countries with particularly low standards is that they'll have to implement changes in order to keep their business contracts with German retailers.

In 2017, ASF wants to generate awareness and an urge to change by working with producers, wholesalers, retailers, politicians, and universities in Germany. Since the aquaculture industry is less organized than land animal industries and since there is no history of fighting the animal protection movement, ASF sees a very high chance that resistance can be kept to a minimum by presenting solutions that will be win-win situations. However, due to the highly heterogeneous German aquaculture market for fish farming – ranging from small traditional farms at mountain creeks to highly industrialized fish production in concrete basins – it will be crucial to identify a welfare standard strategy that a majority of producers could realistically comply with after some efforts.

In order to find the best asks and campaign goals, ASF wants to do a study that collects and weighs different ways of reducing fish suffering in aquaculture and that does cost analyses for different enhancements. The goal is to find the most cost-effective ways to reduce fish suffering. ASF then wants to develop a set of criteria that can be used in negotiations with retailers.

ASF also wants to start tackling aquaculture internationally starting by studying the legal welfare standards in fish farming in the countries with the highest production levels (China, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam) and to do a comparison with European and U.S. standards. The resulting paper will show where regulation exists and (mostly) what kind of regulation is missing. This paper shall be translated into English and will be used to stress that retailers urgently need to raise standards themselves. ASF will also ask retailers to call for better regulation.

In order to gain international influence, ASF wants to put together a task force of experts and retailers who get in touch with Chinese diplomatic representations in Germany. The aim is to build relationships and to organize visits to large aquaculture producers in China that have the main topic of improving fish welfare. (If efforts with China fail, other high-producing countries can be targeted.)

While the main focus in 2017 is to find the right criteria and to build the right relationships, the main focus in 2018 will be on implementing criteria and actually reducing fish suffering in aquaculture. The outcome of the studies and the workshops with producers and political stakeholders will be used to define a strategy for change management concerning aquaculture in Germany and abroad. If possible, a code of conduct shall be developed that secures both better fish welfare and higher prices. Furthermore, these efforts shall be transferred into a European and Asian initiative: ASF wants to work closely with NGOs and other stakeholders in other countries.

ASF also wants to stay on top of latest research (mostly by contracting universities to compile the latest studies). All useful results will be made available in English to the animal protection movement.

Budget in 2017

Intervention	Costs
Awareness creation for producers through different workshops (fish suffering, leverage to reduce suffering through better conditions, transport, feeding, water quality)	27,000 €
Awareness creation for retailers and politicians through different workshops (fish suffering, leverage to reduce suffering through better conditions, transport, feeding, water quality)	14,000 €
Venues, travelling, consulting, project management	14,500 €
Communication (including meetings with stakeholders)	20,000 €
Working with universities	20,000 €
Collecting and weighing ways to reduce fish suffering in aquaculture including cost-analyses	50,000 €
Doing a comparative study on legal welfare standards in Asia, EU, and USA and translating it into English	18,000 €
Setting up a task-force and start building relationships to Chinese officials and producers	10,000 €
Total	173,500 €

Budget in 2018

Intervention	Costs
Awareness creation for producers through different workshops (fish suffering, leverage to reduce suffering through better conditions, transport, feeding, water quality)	21,000 €
Awareness creation for retailers and politicians through different workshops (fish suffering, leverage to reduce suffering through better conditions, transport, feeding, water quality)	7,000 €
Stakeholder round tables to develop a code of conduct for fish welfare in aquaculture and a cross-border change management strategy	13,000 €
Venues, travelling, consulting, project management	14,500 €
Communication (including meetings with stakeholders)	20,000 €
Working with universities	20,000 €
Continuing to build relationships with Chinese officials and producers	30,000 €
Total	125,500 €

While ASF is very optimistic for this strategy to work, the organization is aware of risks that the aquaculture industry won't be open (enough) for dialogue. Should this be the case, ASF would change its approach from being cooperative to becoming confrontational.