

Role of Aquaculture to Food Security: Global Conference on Aquaculture 2010

Three important events served as paths to the World Food Summit, organized by FAO in Rome from 16-18 November 2009. A high-level expert forum “How to feed the world in 2050” held from 12-13 October 2009 examined policy options which governments should consider adopting to ensure that the world population can be fed when it nears its peak of nearly 9.2 billion people in the middle of this century. From October 14-17, 2009, the Committee on World Food Security, immediately following the high-level expert forum, considered reforms that will enable it to play a much more effective role in the global governance of food security. And the third major event was the World Food Day (celebrated annually every 16th of October) with the theme - how to ensure food security in times of crisis.

Now that the summit is over, declaration has been agreed, the greatest task, as in all other summits, is how to get down to implementation, how to get the words/narrative into actions. The Summit declaration vows governance, increased investment and proactive climate change strategy.

Aquaculture, although not specifically highlighted during the Summit can have a potentially strong role in contributing to food security even in times of crisis. With an average growth rate of 8.8 percent per annum since 1970, aquaculture is now recognized as a rapidly expanding sector of the global economy. During a period of slim prospects from capture fisheries and increasing demand for fish and fishery products, aquaculture will be expected to continue to increase its contribution to the world's production of aquatic food. Thus, its role in food security will be strengthened while also offering opportunities to contribute to poverty alleviation, community development and to reduce overexploitation of natural aquatic resources. The big diversity of species, farming systems, practices, environments and resource use patterns offer a wide range of opportunities for diversifying food production as well as income generation through aquaculture.

While aquaculture represents a viable solution to food security challenges confronting the global population, like other food producing sectors, it is also facing a number of important challenges and other emerging

issues in terms of sustainability, governance, public perception, conflicts with other users of aquatic habitat, environmental impacts, biosecurity and climate change, to mention a few.

Various public and private sector stakeholders are trying to do their best within their areas of responsibilities and capacities to contribute to the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector. On the part of FAO, apart from the many short- and long-term programmes being implemented including assistance to members, all aimed to contribute to the process, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture is organising the Global Conference on Aquaculture 2010 from June 9-12, 2010 in Bangkok, Thailand with the theme Farming the Waters for Food and People. The theme appears appropriate in current times as aquaculture now provides nearly 50 percent of food fish consumed globally and is recognized as a great source of jobs and income for millions of people directly involved in primary production and the support services.

The Conference will review the present status and trends in aquaculture development, evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the 2000 Bangkok Declaration and Strategy, address emerging issues, assess opportunities and challenges for future development and build consensus on advancing aquaculture as a global, sustainable and competitive food producing sector. While the task faced by the sector is not new, it is enormous. But the tools are available, developed and expanded since 2 300 years ago from the first publication “Fish husbandry” by Chinese scholar-statesman Fan Li who wrote the first how-to-do-it treatise. What is needed is to make these tools sharper and more versatile for a warming Earth.

Everyone is invited and welcome to participate in the conference and contribute to the ongoing multifaceted process of contributing to food security through responsible aquaculture.

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