



AAC Recommendation on Promoting the involvement of young professionals in aquaculture

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I. Introduction

The 'Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030'¹ aims at building resilience and competitiveness for the EU aquaculture sector while at the same time supporting the need to increase the sector's social acceptability. Actions will need to be carried out and strengthened to improve access to jobs, training and skills enhancement.

Promoting the attractiveness of aquaculture among young people is a key action that must be taken to develop the sector and to strengthen it economically by generating young farmers and workers (e.g. technicians, biologists, personnel with administrative tasks).

According to many stakeholders, particularly young farmers, there are socioeconomic but also motivational and informative training difficulties that hinder young farmers' access to aquaculture professions and entrepreneurship. This is true for all types of aquaculture.

To learn more about young people engaging in aquaculture and to highlight the issues and opportunities that they consider critical, the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) has asked more than 30 European Union (EU) young aquaculture professionals under 35 years old representing 12 countries and the diversity of aquaculture production in Europe to note the challenges, bottlenecks and possible solutions that they see for their own activities and for the development of the sector from their perspectives.

II. Young professionals' remarks

The young professionals advocated for a detailed analysis of the issues that keep their peers away from aquaculture and identified the following critical areas:

- Complications with bureaucracy at different levels: This concerns the difficulties in obtaining permits and licences, with little clarity in the procedures for obtaining them and accessing financing from both the EU and national and regional funds.
- A level playing field within the EU must be ensured, avoiding the current inequalities in access to limited spaces for aquaculture and in the costs of obtaining and maintaining permits or licences related to aquaculture.
- Lack of support: Startups and/or new innovations/investments are rarely supported by banks or public authorities, making it harder for young professionals to compete with existing companies in the sector.
- Unattractiveness of aquaculture to young people: Aquaculture is not perceived by young people as attractive or lucrative, in contrast to other agricultural activities.

¹ COM (2021) 236 final



In particular, the outdoor nature of the job and the sectoral way of working are not seen as appealing.

- Lack of training: Basic education and continuous training programmes about aquaculture and its role in the food chain are lacking.
- Funding problems: The methods of fund allocation and the poor timing of funding disbursements can be problematic for young producers, whether self-entrepreneurs or those working in a family business.
- Unattractiveness of aquaculture to other young professionals: Beyond young producers, aquaculture should have the capacity to attract other young professionals, such as engineers, veterinarians, information technology experts and salespersons.

In the view of the young aquaculture professionals surveyed, the aforementioned factors may impede further development of the aquaculture industry. On the other hand, they highlighted the following measures that they would welcome as incentives and solutions to their challenges:

- Proposing innovative solutions in modulating production systems in terms of resilience to adapt to climate change, new market needs, sustainability requirements and maritime and inland water spatial planning.
- Bringing new views or perspectives to the issues of health, food, well-being, and food safety.
- Collaborating in the development of educational and training programmes that are in step with the times and are attractive.

III. Recommendations

For the strategic development of the aquaculture sector in all its forms and of the opportunities it can bring, the role of young professionals in the sector must be highlighted, promoted, and supported by all institutions, specifically the EU, the European Commission (EC), and their member states.

The AAC recommends the following actions:

- For the European Commission:
 - Strengthen the dissemination of innovations in all fields, which can provide an impetus for the development of the sector. Promote cooperation between stakeholders,





institutions, and researchers, with a specific focus on the entry of young professionals into the sector (e.g. encouraging the development of startups, digitalisation, etc.).

- Make special mention of the role of young professionals in the upcoming EU-wide communication campaign on aquaculture.
 - Provide the EU member states with a platform for exchanging good practices on how to better help young farmers in the aquaculture sector.
- For the EU member states:
- Simplify the access to space and waters for aquaculture for new aquaculture producers.
 - Simplify the access to credit and financing (e.g. the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF)) for young people and women by intervening in its procedural simplification and in the duration of the financing process.
 - Cut the red tape and create priority procedures for young people and/or companies that employ young people to obtain licences and permits, taking into account the dimensional (e.g. large presence of micro-enterprises or family businesses), geographical and typological differences that characterise European aquaculture.
- For the EC and its member states:
- Increase aquaculture's attractiveness by linking the aquaculture sector to the broader food production industry (at the same level as agriculture) and conveying to others how it is a sector that generates work and professional growth opportunities through smart and innovative information and promotion campaigns that appeal to the young.
 - Facilitate the development and harmonisation of training courses (basic and specialist) and continuous professional development by both public and private educational institutions.





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