

A three-year project to promote production and marketing of organic aquaculture products in the Asia-Pacific region, funded by the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) and implemented by INFOFISH, ended recently. Supervised by the FAO Subcommittee on Fish Trade, the US\$1.4 million project began in 2007 with separate launches in the three focus countries of the project (Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand). The national coordinator of the project in each country was its respective Department of Fisheries (DoF).



Tarlochan Singh

The objectives of the project were to: contribute to the sustainable development of the aquaculture sector by ensuring safety of aquaculture products from the Asia-Pacific; increase knowledge on certification and

The CFC organic aquaculture project – promoting an Asian organic seafood generation

A three-year CFC-funded project, which ended recently, successfully produced and marketed certified organic aquaculture products from three Southeast Asian countries, sparking off interest in organic aquafarming in the region and an Asian generation of organic seafood.

**A harvest of organic freshwater prawns from Arsha Thar farm, Myanmar.
Inset: Organic shrimp from a pond of the Kung Krabaen Royal Development Study Centre, Chanthaburi, Thailand**





The three main species produced under the project (from left): Organic black tiger shrimp, tilapia and freshwater prawn.

marketing of organic aquaculture products; facilitate transfer of technology to small and medium scale sectors of production and marketing of organic aquaculture products; and encourage investment in sustainable, eco-friendly aquaculture and domestic marketing and export-processing of produce.

The four main components of the project were: technology adaptation/ transfer; market studies, promotion and export trials; investment promotion; and technology and information dissemination. Twelve companies, four from each focus country, were selected to participate in the project. The companies were required to set aside a portion of their farm

area for organic farming. Technical advice and training on organic farming, postharvest handling and processing was provided by experts under the project and the farms were assisted to obtain organic certification. When organic production was achieved, the companies were provided assistance in marketing their product.

Technology transfer

Technology transfer was carried out through regular field visits, consultations, study visits and trainings conducted using inhouse INFOFISH experts, technical experts

from DoF, Thailand and by experts from Naturland, an internationally recognised organic certification organisation based in Germany. The Thai DoF already had in place national certification systems for good aquaculture practices (GAP) and had recently set up a national organic certification system with its own certification agency (the Organic Aquaculture Farm and Products Certification Centre, OAPC) well ahead of other countries in the region, so it was natural that they became the main source of technical expertise for the project. Naturland, which has a track record in organic certification, including in tropical aquaculture, was requested to evaluate the project farms initially.

Technical input and training was based on the level of need of each country/ project partner and programmes were organised accordingly. Two training workshops on good aquaculture practices and traceability and one on postharvest technology for organic fish and fishery products were organised in Yangon, Myanmar while a one-day seminar on organic aquaculture was held in Putrajaya, Malaysia. A total of some 140 participants attended these workshops and seminars. In addition, two study visits were arranged, one for a delegation from Malaysia and another from Myanmar, to organic farms in Thailand in order to observe organic farming methods firsthand.

Organic certification

The farms which had successfully converted to organic farming and adopted the organic farming technology were assisted to obtain organic certification. Two certification systems were adopted under the



Technology transfer was achieved through regular farm and site visits, consultations and training workshops.



The OAPC logo

project.

The first was the organic certification system of the OAPC, Thailand. After inspection by auditors from the OAPC, six

farms under the project - three in Thailand, two in Myanmar and one in Malaysia - were approved for OAPC organic certification. The farms are the *Kung Krabaen Bay Royal Development Study Centre* and the *Sureerath Farm* in Chanthaburi province, and *Surakit Farm* in Samutprakarn (all in Thailand); *Arsha Thar International Co* in Nyaungdon Township and *Pale Nadi Co* in Kyauktan Township (both in Myanmar); and the *LKIM Brackishwater Shrimp Farm*, Kg Fikri, Terengganu (in Malaysia). Two of these farms, *Sureerath* and *Surakit*, also obtained Naturland certification in addition to the OAPC certification.

Marketing assistance

To assist the project partners in marketing their products, market promotion programmes were carried out through participation in international seafood exhibitions and through direct buyer-



As a result of the project's market promotion activities, Naturland and OAPC certified organic black tiger shrimp from Thailand was exported to the

Pamphlets about the project and its products were printed and distributed at various seafood shows.



Left: Organic products from the project were displayed at various seafood trade shows. Right: "Chemical-free" freshwater fish, including tilapia from the project's Lake Kenyir farm, is now being marketed live in hypermarkets in Malaysia.

seller matching. Products from the project farms were exhibited at the Dubai International Seafood Show (26-29 October 2008), the European Seafood Exhibition (28-30 April 2009), the China Fisheries and Seafood Exposition (4-6 November 2008) and the Japan International Seafood Show (22-24 July 2009). In addition, direct buyer-seller missions were arranged between project farms and selected buyers in Malaysia and Singapore. Organic shrimp and fish products were also introduced to high-end hotels in Bangkok, Thailand for inclusion in their daily menus. In addition, live freshwater fish, including from a project farm in Malaysia, were introduced to hypermarkets for sale in eye catching aquarium displays in the hypermarkets.

EU (Switzerland and Germany), Japan and China. A first consignment of organic tilapia and freshwater prawn, as well as "organically grown" pangasius, was also shipped to an organic products retailer in Malaysia from project partner *Arsha Thar* in Myanmar. In addition, *Surakit Farm* in Thailand was able to conclude a long term deal with the 5-star *Peninsular Hotel* to supply it with organic shrimp, fish and other aquatic products. Also, although not yet organically certified because of problems related to local organic feed availability, sales of "chemical-free, eco-friendly" tilapia and other freshwater fish, including from the *Sg Como* project farm, have commenced in *Carrefour* and other hypermarkets in Malaysia, enjoying significant premiums compared to conventional products.

Dissemination and investment promotion

Several activities were carried out under the project to disseminate the findings of the project and to promote investment in organic farming. Attractive brochures giving information about the project and its products were printed and distributed at various seafood trade shows. Information was also disseminated through the official INFOFISH website (www.infofish.org) and a dedicated project website (www.organicfishery.net). Articles about the project were also featured in industry magazines, such as *Seafood*

Malaysian International Seafood Exposition 2011

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Several workshops, including a terminal regional workshop (left) and a national dissemination workshop in Sri Lanka (right), were held in selected countries to disseminate project findings and to promote investment in organic aquaculture.

International and INFOFISH International. During the last few months of the project, nine industry briefings were held in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka

and Thailand to present project findings. In addition, a regional workshop was held in Bangkok, Thailand at the end of the project. Participants of the industry briefings and workshop included industry representatives,

government officials and other stakeholders. In all, a total of some 850 persons attended these workshops.

An important output of the project was the publication of two handbooks on organic

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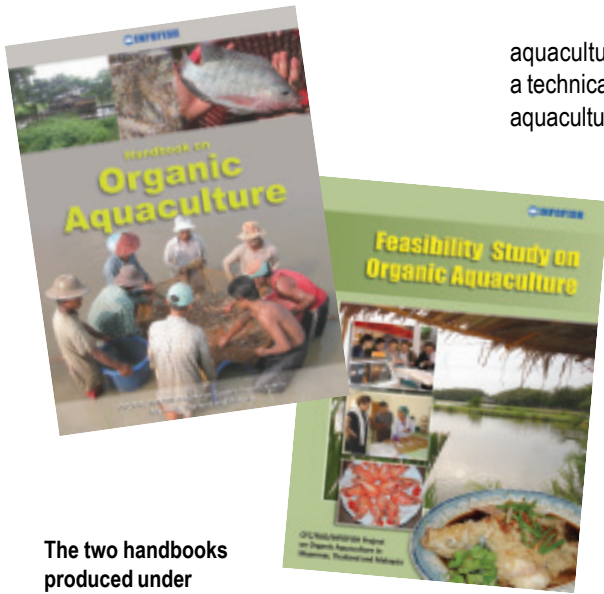
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The CFC organic aquaculture project - promoting an Asian organic seafood generation

AQUACULTURE



The two handbooks produced under the project.

aquaculture produced by INFOFISH. One is a technical handbook on organic aquaculture while the other is a feasibility study on organic aquaculture.

The first gives information on organic aquaculture, its principles, organic certification, organic farm management practices, organic processing, packaging and labelling, and marketing. The second is an economic feasibility study of four different types of organic aquaculture systems for shrimp, freshwater prawn and freshwater fish, based on project experiences. These two publications, which are available

from INFOFISH, are an invaluable guide to potential investors, aquaculturists and others interested in organic aquaculture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the CFC organic aquaculture project has succeeded in demonstrating that aquaculture farms in Asia, with appropriate – and often minimal – modifications, are fully capable of producing certified organic aquaculture products which are well accepted by international markets. It has also shown that there is an emerging market for organic and ecolabelled aquatic products in Asia which is willing to pay the additional premiums commanded by such products.



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AQUACULTURE

The CFC organic aquaculture project - promoting an Asian organic seafood generation

Several countries in the Asian region, notably Bangladesh, India and the Philippines, have in the past few years taken up organic aquafarming initiatives and several others have also expressed interest in the subject. Several other countries in the region, such as Indonesia, Vietnam and China, have also been involved in organic

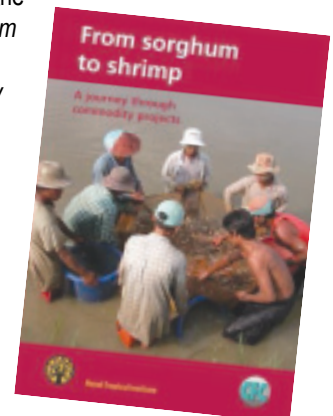
aquaculture for some time. The renewed interest in organic aquaculture is at least in part due to the CFC organic project and related activities of INFOFISH, such as the organisation of the first global technical and trade conference on organic aquaculture in Ho Chi Minh City in 2004.

The role of the project in promoting



Organic products from a project farm in Myanmar which were marketed in Malaysia by an organic products retailer.

economic development in developing countries was one of the reasons why it was included among eleven CFC commodity development projects selected to be featured in a book published recently by the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Netherlands and the CFC. Entitled *From Sorghum to Shrimp: a journey through commodity projects*, the book draws lessons from the experiences of the eleven projects in dealing with the challenges faced while implementing the projects and is meant to be a guide to project managers, implementers and evaluators.



Tarlochan Singh, Chief, Technical Advisory Services at INFOFISH and Editor of *INFOFISH International*, was closely involved with the implementation of the CFC organic aquaculture project.

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