

Food Alliance moves into sustainable seafood certification

Pacific shellfish growers wait for WWF to finish dialogue, more funding

by Sustainable Food News
March 27, 2008



Sustainable food certifier Food Alliance has cast its net into the seafood industry for the first time, landing a deal to certify shellfish growers on the West Coast.

Known as the owner of the most comprehensive agricultural eco-label in North America, the Portland, Ore.-based Food Alliance has certified over 275 farms and ranches in 17 U.S. states, Canada and Mexico.

These producers manage over 5.1 million acres of range and farm land, raising beef, lamb, pork, dairy products, mushrooms, dried beans and lentils, wheat, and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

Sales of products certified under Food Alliance's comprehensive eco-labeling program are estimated at \$100 million in 2007. Earlier this month, Food Alliance said it certified Sysco's subsidiary, Fulton Provision Company, a major meat processor and distributor.



The move into seafood marks a first for the nonprofit, FA's Matthew Buck confirmed to **Sustainable Food News**.

Robin Downey, executive director of the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association (PCSGA), told **SFN** Wednesday that it signed on Food Alliance to certify its shellfish farms under a set of industry standards called Environmental Codes of Practice.

"[FA's] philosophy really aligns with ours," Downey said. "They really get farming."

The Pacific Coast is one of the largest shellfish-producing regions in the world yielding oysters, clams, mussels, geoducks and scallops. Washington State is the biggest producer of farmed oysters in the United States.

Just over a year ago, PCSGA debuted a new eco-label to show the nation's chefs that its members products are sustainably grown, harvested, processed and transported.

But the effort has been "stuck in limbo" due to lack of funds and a concurrent effort by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to develop standards for raising molluscs, Downey said, adding that her group's standards are more specific than WWF's, which are "more general, in nature."

WWF's mollusc dialogue is bringing together more than 40 producers, buyers and scientists to discuss a range of topics involving minimizing potential negative effects of mollusc aquaculture.

Some of these include: the transfer of diseases to wild caught species and harvesting techniques that harm the habitat for example; recommending standards to achieve high performance levels while permitting the shellfish farming industry to remain economically viable; and promoting the beneficial environmental and social aspects of shellfish cultivation.

The final WWF mollusc dialogue is April 8 at the start of the Fish Expo Atlantic trade show in Providence, R.I., held in a joint conference with the National Shellfisheries Association.

Downey said once WWF sets out the standards from the series of dialogues, her group can compare with their own code of practice and "align where we can."

Downey hopes to pull stakeholder groups together by the end of this year to hammer out processes in the certification details.

She envisions shellfish experts from the Pacific Shellfish Institute carrying out the audits of operations under the auspices of the Food Alliance, which will administer certifications based on the shellfish industry's standards. PCSGA has 175 members along the West Coast.

But the project is short about \$200,000, Downey figured. She's banking on a recent grant and another that is pending to help fill some of the gap but declined to disclose the sources.