

Does organic farmed fish exist?

Many consumers perceive the production of organic farmed fish negatively and rank this production alongside the industrialised agriculture.

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Organic aquaculture is a relatively new and alternative form of production, which was implemented in some countries during end of the 1990'ies. However, a national regulation on organic aquaculture was only in place in Denmark in 2004.

By 1st July 2010 the Danish regulation on organic aquaculture was replaced by a common EU regulation for organic aquaculture production. For the pioneers the conversion from conventional to organic aquaculture production has been challenging, but currently ten fresh water farms and two sea cage farms have been converted to organic production.

Additionally, the Danish organic production includes nine organic line mussel farms and two organic crayfish farms.

Compared to the consumption of organic agricultural products the consumption of organic aquaculture products is much lower. There may be more explanations for this, i.a. the organic form of production is relatively new and that a new regulation for organic aquaculture production has been put into force. However, it is also important to realize that it is difficult to explain the organic rules to the consumers, e.g. that fish from the wild are not organic.

Facts

Examples of rules for organic production of rainbow trout in fresh water farms: - Requirement of fulfilling all current environmental requirements by running the farm - max. 25 kg fish/m³ water in the farm - Feed for organic production requires: No GMO, No artificial colour (only limited amounts from natural sources, e.g. shrimps shells), No artificial anti-oxidants, fish meal and fish oil only from sustainable stocks, plant proteins from organic agriculture - Requirement of health consultation with a veterinarian - Only allowed to use chemicals from a positive list in the production - Only allowed max. treatments with antibiotics + double retention time before slaughter - Requirements to continuous registration of quality of both production water and discharged water.

Lack of knowledge about organic fish

Surveys performed among consumers showed that the knowledge about sustainability and organic fish is relatively fragmentary; e.g. stories from the media detached from the context "overfishing", not healthy fish farmed in Asia etc. Very few was able to identify specific rules for organic fish, and often they were mixed up with the MSC certification.

Most part of the Danish organic fish production is currently exported to Germany and due to this the research project RobustFish has investigated the perception of organic fish among German consumers. In cooperation with Fachhochschule Münster Aalborg University has made a survey among German consumers on how they perceive organic fish.

The investigations showed that the perception of organic fish is influenced by their general perception of farmed fish and their perception of agricultural production. Many consumers have a negative perception of farmed fish and rank the production alongside the industrialized agriculture – often contradicting the catch of wild fish in the sea.

Specific for Germany is the existence of regional and local certified products, e.g. Naturland, Bioland, Demeter mm. These conditions are significant to the general perception of organic products among German consumers.

Generally, the participants of the surveys had a positive perception of the food production in Denmark as regards sustainability and ethics. Hence, the consumers express expectations, that the standards in Denmark are high compared to e.g. Germany. In particular, consumers expressed personal experiences of a high gastronomic level in Denmark.

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