

NFS GAA SFP Collaboration – Small Farm Program/AIP

July, 21 2014

National Fish and Seafood, in collaboration with Sustainable Fisheries Partnership and the Global Aquaculture Alliance, is launching four BAP Small Farm Group pilots for the purpose of bringing small shareholder shrimp farmers up to the internationally recognized aquaculture standard for certification under the Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) program. The same groups of farms participating in the program will be used to launch the first Aquaculture Improvement Projects (AIPs) to document improvements in practices being made at the farm and zonal level. The AIP will bring together all stakeholders: farmers, processor, importer, and local government to determine the carrying capacity of the given region and develop policies towards sustainable development of the shrimp farming industry. A better understanding of the impacts and practices of farms in each region is critical in determining a long term, sustainable farming plan with a key emphasis placed on zonal management. The BAP program will help to provide structure and a “road map” for executing these goals.

The BAP multi-species farm standard, created by the GAA, has been highly successful as a third-party verified certification scheme for the shrimp farming industry. The robust standard evaluates farms on three key criteria: food safety, environmental impact, and social accountability. Since inception, hundreds of farms have made the improvements required to meet BAP standards and major retail customers in the US have mandated BAP certified seafood. However, the cost of certification has inhibited many of the thousands of small farmers that make up the bulk of the shrimp farming industry. The purpose of the ‘Group’ certification scheme is to make it feasible for small farms to become certified to the globally recognized standard. Without an inclusive model that significantly reduces the costs for small farms to become certified, only large farms are able to afford certification ensuring their dominance in the market. It is not our intention to promote the certification of farms at the expense of small shareholders; therefore National has prioritized the creation of a ‘Group’ standard to increase the quantity of certified shrimp supplied by small farmers.

With the support of the GAA, NFS will pilot the first four ‘Groups’ in three countries: Vietnam, Indonesia, and India. Groups will consist of between 20-50 farms practicing similar culture methods and located within the same geographic region and will be formed into a single entity. Within each group will be a Facility Group Manger (FGM) who will oversee the compliance of each farm with the BAP standard and will implement a Quality Management System which describes farm protocols and records inputs and outputs. This system will provide the traceability and transparency needed to conduct a desktop audit prior to the dispatch of an auditor who will only audit a sample of the farms hence the savings in the costs of the program. National’s goal to bring small farms into compliance with and certified to the BAP standard will lead to improvements in farming practices, biosecurity measures, traceability, environmental protection, and social responsibility across thousands of farms. This vision is consistent with that of SFP and GAA to promote sustainable aquaculture worldwide while achieving many of the same objectives of an AIP.

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We believe the collaboration capitalizes on the mutual interest between NFS, GAA, and SFP to pilot and demonstrate feasibility of the 'Group' program while documenting and developing sustainable shrimp farming policies by way of AIPs. Through cooperation, each organization stands to advance their cause of promoting responsible aquaculture while making significant strides in protecting and preventing small farmers from becoming disenfranchised. These three members represent the leading organizations striving to improve culture methods in order to increase the supply of sustainably farmed products in the marketplace. Each group has vast experience in educating producers, consumers, and retailers about the importance of sustainable aquaculture. This collaboration will raise the visibility of the good being done by GAA, SFP, and NFS and has the potential to educate consumers about the merits of safe, healthy, and responsibly farmed seafood.

We are very excited by the prospect of this collaboration; this literally has the ability to transform the model of certification for the future, connecting all of the relevant participants and delivering real change on the ground. This is also a highly scalable initiative that we see having the potential to link literally thousands of farms over time.

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