



GAA's Country-By-Country COVID-19 Update: May 5, 2020

Editor's note: Every other week, the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) will provide an update on how key seafood-production and -consumption countries are navigating COVID-19. With more than 2,300 Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP)-certified processing plants, farms, hatcheries and feed mills in 36 countries, GAA is uniquely positioned to provide a synopsis of how the pandemic is affecting aquaculture production facilities' ability to operate, the flow of product in and out of countries and sourcing behaviors in leading markets.

China: Domestic travel restarted in China in April. Foreign visitors are still prohibited from entering the country. Restaurants are open again but operating at about 60 percent capacity. Small restaurants are especially focused on delivery to accommodate office workers who are less likely to go to cafeterias and restaurants. Chinese producers are focused on the domestic market due to the uncertainty in global markets and lack of raw materials. Additionally, tilapia exports to the United States are rising steadily, with most Chinese producers reporting increased sales. Finally, the popularity of traditional wet markets has declined significantly, and the expectation is that new products and product forms will jump in popularity as consumer tastes shift.

India: The lockdown in India has been extended through May 17. The country's seafood trade, particularly the shrimp-farming and -processing sectors, is limping back but expected to return to "normal" in June. As most of the aquaculture regions are in restricted zones, the flow of people and raw materials in and out of these zones remains challenging but has vastly improved over the last two weeks. The peak months for stocking ponds are February and March. But this year colder weather pushed stocking back to March and April. With hatcheries in the east of India and farms in the west, stocking was greatly impacted by weather delays and supply-chain interruptions due to COVID-19. As a result, some farmers lost out on seed, and some hatcheries have not been able to move seed. Currently, demand from China for smaller-sized shrimp is high, benefiting smaller packers who tend to produce HLSO. Cold storages throughout India are reported to be at or near capacity. There is chatter of some farmers converting to species other than shrimp. While this may be true, the trend is not widespread, as shrimp continues to be more profitable than finfish on a commercial scale.

Thailand: The situation in Thailand is improving. Businesses are opening back up. But, like Japan, Thailand is taking a cautious approach and the lockdown, which is in effect through May 31. According to government figures, shrimp exports have shifted from the United States to neighboring Asian markets such as China, Malaysia and Myanmar. Shrimp production is only down about 5 percent compared to a year ago. Processing plants have stringent sanitation and personal-hygiene protocols in place, and visitors are not allowed to enter. Thailand is being cautious about public distancing and restricting the movement of people in and out of cities. Accommodations are being provided to plant workers who must be onsite, and administrative and marketing staff are working remotely.

Vietnam: Like Thailand, the situation in Vietnam is improving. Social-distancing measures are in place through May 16. Ho Chi Minh City is designated as high risk and therefore social-distancing measures there have been extended by one week. But all provinces in the southeast, where many shrimp and pangasius processing plants and farms are located, are designated as low risk.

Indonesia: Opportunities are opening up for Indonesian packers, and most seem to be busy with packing IQF items. The Japanese market for breaded shrimp has been lethargic. But the Australian and U.S. markets are actively purchasing. Like in other Southeast Asian countries, social-distancing measures are in place in Indonesia, and Indonesia's food-safety agency is providing processing plants guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Ecuador: in Ecuador, the government-mandated national curfew ended May 3, but authorities continue to limit weekday transit between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m., and citizens must wear face masks, carry hand sanitizer and practice social distancing. All citizens must remain at home on the weekends. Shrimp processing plants remain in operation, with stringent sanitation and personal-hygiene protocols in place, and visitors are not allowed to enter.

Chile: In Chile, areas classified as high risk remain in lockdown, while areas classified as low risk are more open, with fewer restrictions. Salmon processing plants and farms remain in operation. However, visitors are not allowed to enter. Airports are open to domestic travel, but international travel is limited to non-existent.

Colombia: Similar to Ecuador and Chile, aquaculture operations remain in operation, with stringent sanitation and personal-hygiene protocols in place, and visitors are not allowed to enter.

Mexico: U.S. officials continue to raise concerns about disrupted North American supply chains due to Mexico's list of "essential" services being out of sync with United States' and Canada's. On April 29, a bipartisan group of 11 U.S. senators addressed a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, urging him to work with the Mexican government in order to clarify its list of essential services.

United States: It is difficult to define the situation in the United States, as each state has a different approach to managing COVID-19. The states hardest hit by COVID-19, such as New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, are taking a cautious approach to reopening their economies, while states in the central and southeastern United States are being more aggressive with reopening their economies. In the United States, oversight is multi-tiered, with federal, state and local governments dictating regulations for food-production facilities. As such, some facilities are running at 50 percent capacity, while others are alternating shifts or closed for cleaning and testing.

Canada: Like the United States, the situation varies from province to province, as each province has a different approach to managing COVID-19 and reopening their economies.

Europe: The lockdown in the United Kingdom remains in effect, with only essential travel allowed. Discussions are beginning on easing the lockdown, with government policies due to be announced in the coming days. In continental Europe, Germany and Austria are the furthest along in easing the lockdown, with retail reopening and children returning to school. Travel restrictions and stay-at-home orders in other countries, including France, remain in place. Food, including seafood, producers are focused on basic product forms such as frozen and shelf-stable, and the flow of raw materials remains uninterrupted. Restaurants are shifting to takeaway and delivery, but overall the foodservice sector has been decimated. One estimate has seafood sales at foodservice in the UK down £100M per week.